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CRITICAL INCIDENT NO. 13

SOUTHEAST ASIA FORCE DEPLOYMENTS BUILDUP (U)

PART I, 1965

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E. C. Janicik

March 1968

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FOREWORD

(S) This study was undertaken in response to an express request by the Director for Operations, Joint Staff. It is being conducted in accordance with arrangements established by DJSM 1111-61, dated 14 September 1961, as revised and updated by CM 2019-66, dated 23 December 1966. The specific reference is J-3M-1653-66, dated 6 October 1966.

(TS) The purpose of the study is to reconstruct and analyze the operational performance of the national command system in planning and executing successive force deployments to Southeast Asia in connection with the Vietnam war, especially those events attending the great buildup beginning early in 1965. It examines the origins, background, and evolution of U.S. involvement and how it grew to be the massive force commitment it became.

(S) Not a history of the Vietnam war, the study deals monographically with only selected aspects of deployment phenomena. The main thrust of inquiry is addressed to command processes, rather than to the concrete details of carrying out the troop movements themselves. It accordingly is concerned essentially with the complex interplay of substantive staffing and decision actions, the premises and rationale behind them, and the policy context in which they occur. The perspective is from the seat-of-government level, with the focus centering on the Joint Staff role both in generating force requirements and in obtaining national approval authorizing deployment of forces to meet them. Stress is placed on that role as it figured in the various discrete functional stages of the decision-making cycle, namely, the predecision, transdecision, and implementation phases. Where appropriate, relevant external factors having direct causal

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bearing, either at the field level or on higher political echelons, are duly taken into account. Similarly, the impact and consequences of any given action, as well as of the particular way in which it came about, are included wherever they are of significance in understanding the effect of what transpired.

(U) The research, analysis, and writing involved in preparing this study report were performed by Dr. Edward C. Janicik of the Institute for Defense Analyses.

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION	1
General Characteristics of Deployment Phenomena	1
Contextual Considerations	2
Origins and Background.	7
The 1964 Expansion of the Advisory Effort	13
CHAPTER II - INTRODUCTION OF U.S. GROUND COMBAT FORCES	27
Emergence of Two Parallel Independent Requirements for Forces.	27
Deterrence/contingency Requirements	29
Local Security Requirements	33
The Initial Ground Combat Deployment.	37
The CSA Three-Division Recommendation	40
The JCS Intervention Proposal	45
Deterrence/Contingency Requirements Reconsidered.	49
Intensified Local Security Requirements	52
The April Presidential Decisions.	54
Crossing the Threshold.	58
The April Honolulu Deployment Planning Conference	61
The JCS Stretched-Out Three-Division Proposal	70
SecDef Cutback of the Three-Division Proposal	73
The Eight-Battalion Reduced Program	75
Interim ad hoc Deployments.	76
JCS Reclama of the Program Reduction and the CSAF Demurrer	81
CHAPTER III - U.S. ENTRY IN THE GROUND WAR AS COBELLIGERENT.	84
The Crisis Stage in the Military Situation.	84
The Strategy Debate	86

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JCS 23-U.S. Battalion Deployment Proposal.	90
Approval of 7 Additional U.S. Battalions	94
The 34-U.S. Battalion Requirement.	97
The 2 July JCS Program Proposal for 44 U.S./Allied Battalions.	102
CHAPTER IV - PHASE I DEPLOYMENT PROGRAMS	110
The SecDef July Visit to Vietnam	110
The SecDef July Plan and the July Presidential Decision.	114
The August CINCPAC Deployment Coordination Conference for Phase I	117
Developing an Updated Phase I Program	118
Approval of the Phase I Program	121
A Strategic Concept for Deployments.	123
Strategic Side Effects of the Buildup.	129
Phase I Add-ons.	132
CHAPTER V - PHASE II DEPLOYMENTS PROGRAMS	135
The Original Phase II Program.	135
The November Presidential Decisions.	147
Phase IIA Program.	149
The SecDef December Plan	155
Phase IIA-Revised and the 101 U.S./Allied Battalion Requirement.	158

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Outline Chronology of Significant Events
Part 1, Deployments Buildup

1965

- 5 Jan CINCPAC forwards COMUSMACV's proposal to deploy a U.S. division force, augmented by Allied troops, south of the DMZ as a deterrent in connection with contemplated air action against North Vietnam.
- 22 Jan COMUSMACV requests an MP battalion for local security of Saigon headquarters and elsewhere.
- 1 Feb CSA proposes 2 to 3 division ground force be deployed to Vietnam and Thailand for deterrence/contingency purposes ancillary to the planned ROLLING THUNDER campaign of air operations against DRV targets.
- 7 Feb FLAMING DART air strikes against DRV executed in retaliation for VC attack on Pleiku and other incidents. Ground forces of WESTPAC quick-reaction reserve alerted and/or prepositioned in readiness, and part of USMC LAAM battalion (HAWK) deployed to Danang.
- 11 Feb JCS (less CSA) recommend deployment of one MEB to Danang and one US Army brigade to Thailand for deterrence/contingency as part of upcoming ROLLING THUNDER plan (CSA believe not enough, but COMUSMACV and CINCPAC later agree it is.)
- 15 Feb DEPCOMUSMACV, after inspecting security at Danang, finds base complex vulnerable and recommends 9th MEB as local security force now.
- 19 Feb U.S. jet aircraft stationed in South Vietnam first employed in tactical combat role for air support of ARVN as military situation worsens.
- 2 Mar ROLLING THUNDER campaign of sustained air strikes against North Vietnam launched.
- 5 Mar CJCS queries COMUSMACV, in light of deteriorating military situation, whether 9th MEB is enough to secure Danang installations, and if perhaps conditions generally might not have degenerated to a point where the GVN war effort is collapsing.
- 6 Mar COMUSMACV responds with appraisal that military situation is serious but not hopeless and can be salvaged if U.S. does whatever is militarily necessary to prevent defeat, including U.S. air and ground combat forces joining in the fighting.
- 6 Mar President approves deployment of 2 BLTs of 9th MEB to Danang, but for local area security only and not to engage in tactical counterinsurgency operations.

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8 Mar Elements of 9th MEB, the first U.S. ground combat troops in Vietnam, begin arriving at Danang.

14 Mar CSA, following a fact-finding trip to Vietnam, becomes convinced of the need for large scale intervention and begins advocating introduction of 3-division U.S./Allied ground force.

17 Mar JCS agree on CSA's 3-division intervention proposal.

17 Mar COMUSMACV requests 2 more Marine BLTs and support elements for Chu Lai.

20 Mar JCS recommend intervention and propose deploying a 3-division U.S./Allied force (augmented) consisting of 1 USMC MEF, 1 US Army division force and 1 ROK division force, for a total of 86,000 combat troops plus 75,000 support personnel.

21 Mar COMUSMACV requests a mobile Army brigade as a quick-reaction emergency force.

29 Mar COMUSMACV urgently requests more Marines to meet immediate local security needs.

30 Mar VC terrorist bombing attack on US embassy in Saigon.

30 Mar CINCPAC recommends 173rd Abne Brigade for defense of key military facilities in Saigon vicinity.

1 Apr President at NSC meeting decides to approve deployment of 2 additional BLTs and 1 Marine air squadron, plus support elements, and changes the mission of all Marines in-country to allow active engagement in counterinsurgency combat operations. Also authorizes immediate increase of 18-20,000 in U.S. support forces and directs urgent efforts to seek Korean, Australian, and New Zealand combat troops.

10 Apr Honolulu deployment planning conference generates requirements for 31 U.S./Allied maneuver battalions for South Vietnam and 3 U.S. for Thailand, plus combat, service, and logistic support.

10 Apr Additional Marines begin arriving in Danang area.

12 Apr COMUSMACV urgently requests 173rd Airborne Brigade for Saigon area.

15 Apr President approves 2 Marines BLTs, with support, for Chu Lai and the 173rd Airborne Brigade for the Saigon area.

17 Apr JCS recommend deployment of forces as developed by Honolulu deployment planning conference, plus additional support elements, for a grand total of 194,330 personnel, most to close in-country by early August 1965.

20 Apr SecDef at Honolulu cuts back proposed program from 34 U.S./Allied battalions to 12, plus other reductions, for a total of 55,000 additional personnel.

30 Apr JCS forward new recommendations for the reduced deployment program, now calling for only 8 additional U.S. and 4 Allied maneuver battalions for South Vietnam and none for Thailand.

1 May MEB, plus Marine construction battalion, ordered to Chu Lai.

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3 May 173rd Airborne begins arriving Saigon area.

19 May JCS reclama the deployment program cutback and again recommend a 3-division (plus) force, offering DRV/Chicom threat as added justification for the requirement.

7 Jun COMUSMACV, in response to CJCS request for assessment, appraises the declining military situation as on the way to collapse unless substantial outside forces are brought in. He requests immediate deployment of 25 additional maneuver battalions, i.e., remainder of the full 3-division force recommended.

11 Jun JCS recommend 23 more maneuver battalions and appropriate support forces for Vietnam as soon as possible.

11 Jun NSC fails to reach decision on JCS recommendation.

16 Jun Presidential approval granted for only 7 additional maneuver battalions for immediate deployment to Vietnam now, with remainder to follow eventually if needed and when available.

18 Jun First B-52 strikes from Guam (ARC LIGHT) against VC targets in South Vietnam.

27 Jun COMUSMACV reconfirms total overall requirement as 44 maneuver battalion force (34 U.S., 10 Allied), plus air and logistic support of considerable magnitude.

2 Jul JCS recommend 44 battalion U.S./Allied force.

28 Jul President approves for planning purposes SecDef "July Plan" providing for most of U.S. portion (34 maneuver battalions) of 44-battalion requirement, but with reductions in supporting elements.

23 Aug JCS submit additional requirements to round out 44 U.S./Allied battalion force, now referred to as Phase I deployment program.

29 Aug Battle of Van Tuong, first major tactical engagement of U.S. ground combat units.

7 Sep President approves part of the additions to Phase I.

24 Sep JCS recommend, because of limited resource capability, going on partial war mobilization footing to meet Vietnam requirements.

7 Oct CINCPAC planning conference develops Phase II deployment program calling for 28 more U.S. maneuver battalions and associated support, which with Phase I forces would provide for a total of 78 U.S./Allied maneuver battalions in-country by the end of CY 66.

23 Oct Phase I program is refined and amended upward in support forces, resulting in Phase I Add-ons as new program increment, which is approved by SecDef.

10 Nov JCS recommend the Phase II deployment program as developed by CINCPAC conference.

10 Nov JCS recommend reconstitution of strategic reserve and rebuilding rotation and training base in connection with implementation of Phase II.

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- 11 Nov Presidential decision approves Phase II deployment program.
- 21 Nov COMUSMACV reports serious adverse trend in enemy-friendly force ratios and expects them to get worse despite Phase II deployments.
- 28 Nov SecDef visits Vietnam and gets impromptu Phase IIA program of additional force requirements beyond Phase II.
- 30 Nov SecDef approves Phase IIA program additions amounting to 25 more maneuver battalions.
- 11 Dec SecDef submits and President approves for planning purposes the SecDef "December Plan" incorporating Phase IIA additions
- 16 Dec CINCPAC planning conference modifies Phase IIA upward to take into account additional force needs not provided for in original improvised requirement. Phase IIA Revised program would bring, by end of CY 1966, a total of 101 U.S./Allied maneuver battalions in-country (78 U.S., 22 ROK, 1 ANZAC), and with additional support forces, make a total U.S./Allied strength of 485,000 in Vietnam, plus another 125,560 additional U.S. personnel deployed to other PACOM areas.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF DEPLOYMENT PHENOMENA

(TS) The U.S. military commitment in Vietnam evolved, both in degree and kind, somewhat exponentially. Through time, the quantitative progression in cumulative magnitude of manpower and material resources allocated to the war follows a distinct J-curve, while an in-phase qualitative transformation changing the nature, scope, and intensity of involvement roughly parallels the increasing scale. Successive force deployments accordingly manifest essentially similar characteristics, with a corresponding advance in numbers and expansion of roles along a common escalatory continuum. This same pattern of steady incremental growth holds more or less consistently for all Southeast Asia, including Thailand, and to some extent for the entire WESTPAC area as well. Only recently has the basic curve begun to show tentative signs of possibly rounding off and perhaps becoming bell-shaped.

(S) The great buildup proper commenced early in 1965. It started out slowly and on a modest scale, gradually accelerating in pace and growing in size until it reached vast proportions. It became the largest U.S. overseas military undertaking since World War II (in many respects actually rivaling that in the Pacific then) and the third largest in the nation's history. It is already the longest war the U.S. has ever been in (not excluding the American Revolutionary War). Yet it all came about without benefit of express national intent to do so beforehand. Rather than being the predetermined product of a deliberate decision to embark on such a course of action, the event of the buildup occurred as the culmination of drifting inexorably

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into a policy commitment over a period of many years.

(C) From the Washington perspective the war and its conduct have been viewed largely in terms of force deployments. Policy and strategy issues tended so to be articulated, decisions cast, and military courses of action formulated. The dimension of force commitment served as the one explicit mode and common reference for management direction of the national response at any given time.

(S) U.S. involvement, with respect to force deployments, historically falls into four phases. The first, beginning in the early 1950's and lasting until the end of 1961, was characterized by indirect military aid in the form of equipment, supplies, training, and advisory assistance, with a minimum number of U.S. personnel in Vietnam. The second stage, from 1962 to early 1965, was a long transitional period during which limited numbers and selective types of organized service and operational units were deployed and U.S. forces increasingly participated in a combat support role, but restricted and under various covers. In the third stage, from early 1965 to mid-1966, the U.S. became a cobelligerent, with large numbers of U.S. ground combat forces being deployed and engaging directly in tactical actions against the VC in conjunction with Vietnamese armed forces (as well as U.S. bombing of DRV targets). The fourth phase, from mid-1966 to the present, is the current one, with its full massive buildup and U.S. forces taking over the war.

CONTEXTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

(S) From the beginning, a pronounced attitudinal set pervaded the U.S. approach to the problem of Communist encroachment in Vietnam and Southeast Asia, latent vestiges of which persist to this day and influence present policy and strategy. The U.S. was extremely reluctant to become involved militarily. The problem was indeed recognized early as of concern to the U.S., yet not as a pressingly immediate enough threat to vital interests to justify the U.S. itself assuming

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primary responsibility for dealing with it. Thus, for a long time the U.S. determinedly avoided direct involvement, and once becoming involved, thereafter at each stage equally determinedly tried to resist further increasing that involvement.

(C) The Vietnam war is an unpopular war. America itself has been less than sanguine about waging it, while much of the rest of the world condemns us. Initially, there was little domestic enthusiasm for entering the war, either at the official or grass-roots level, and had circumstances presented intervention as a discrete choice, rather than piecemeal in imperceptible creeping installments, America may have elected otherwise. Subsequently, the war has failed to engender a martial elan such as would infuse the country with single-minded national purpose. On the contrary, it has proved divisive. At best a grudging acquiescence obtains, rationalizing U.S. participation negatively and by default -- i.e., undesirable as it is, there is no alternative. At worst, serious undercurrents of opposition and outspoken defiance assert themselves, rejecting the war peremptorily -- i.e., the U.S. should reverse its course and withdraw.

(U) At the root of the problem has been the unique nature of the war. The typically evanescent conditions associated with insurgency make for a situation fraught with ambiguity. Prima facie it was not at the outset nor later a forthright case of attack from outside in the classic sense of invasion, but rather purported to be -- and in some respects appeared -- an internal political struggle acquiring a military dimension on the order of insurrection. Depending on the quarter, it has been variously interpreted as subversion, insurgency, indirect aggression, civil war, revolution, or war of liberation. It manifests features of all of them. Significantly the U.S. has not formally declared war on anyone.

(C) In these confused circumstances the amorphous cause of trying to stop Communist penetration in remote Southeast Asia lacked

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the qualities of an unequivocal imperative. It just did not have a dramatic salience nor project a clear-cut issue to fire the imagination and conscience of America and the world. In fact, questions of morality and legality regarding U.S. intervention automatically arose. There is a long history of doubt and hesitation about the propriety of U.S. involvement, as witness the soul searching and misgivings accompanying every significant enlargement of the U.S. commitment. The extraordinary lengths to which the Administration has felt compelled to go to plead its case and justify its actions before the American people is indicative.

(C) Yet what was happening in Vietnam was seemingly part of an emerging larger pattern occurring worldwide, in other Southeast Asian countries, in Latin America, and elsewhere. The implications were alarming. Through infiltration, agitation, and systematic guerrilla techniques, Communism had found a new way to conquest by boring from within, one that was as effective as it was cheap. It was moreover difficult to cope with militarily. Conventional tactics and doctrine were patently unsuitable. Over and above preoccupation with legitimate limits of permissible action, therefore, more practical considerations of finding expedient countermeasures that might be both productive and feasible posed a substantive dilemma of strategic proportions that was never solved. Looming large always was the spectre of what a military adventure on the Asian mainland might lead to. U.S. leadership, however, was convinced that something had to be done.

(C) The prevailing view for a long time was that the Communist challenge should be met locally by the people most concerned, with the U.S. helping by making available the necessary wherewithal to do so. Accordingly, the U.S. tried to limit its help to providing all aid and assistance short of itself engaging directly in active combat against the enemy. Friendly indigenous forces thereby would in effect function in a surrogate capacity to further U.S. objectives incidental to serving their own best interests. Such an idea, besides having a

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certain pragmatic cogency, held much appeal on moral as well as legal grounds, and was politically palatable. Militarily it also appeared to be the soundest course.

(6) When this concept was gradually abandoned de facto as unworkable and more and more U.S. combat forces were introduced, other objective factors tended to militate against as full a measure of commitment as military circumstances at any given time seemed to warrant. Chief among these was the very real haunting fear of inadvertently escalating the war beyond the bounds of limited controlled quid pro quo response. Placing a premium on fine judgment in an area of unknowns, it made for caution and reservations, the net result of which was to slow the deployment buildup. Later, as the drain on military resources became more telling, the dislocating effect on posture and capability generally also had a bearing on how much could be safely devoted to Vietnam without incurring unacceptable vulnerabilities elsewhere. Ultimately, even the degree of internal dislocation in the domestic economy became a qualifying condition affecting the level of commitment.

(7) But subjective contextual constraints were probably overriding. At home, the Administration has so far been unable to evoke public opinion support from the customary wellsprings of wartime patriotism. Nor have all elements of the Government itself demonstrated unanimity. As U.S. involvement deepened, opposition increased. Though the mass of the populace remained passively resigned and apathetic, significant segments were overtly disaffected or actively protesting. A good part of the intelligentsia was alienated, and important Congressional and other political leaders were openly critical. Occasionally passions were aroused. Small intractable elements have sporadically resorted to demonstrations and melodramatic emotional behavior to register disapproval and bring direct pressure to bear on the organs of constituted authority. At times, anti-Government feeling regarding the war has run high, but it never

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succeeded in mobilizing enough momentum and direction to have determining impact. Nevertheless, it weighed heavily on U.S. deployment decisions.

(C) Abroad, except for a few isolated cases, there has similarly been a conspicuous absence of international sympathy for the American position, let alone cooperation, and progressively less acceptance of the intensifying courses of action adopted. World opinion has been almost universally antagonistic. Officially, those Allies not disapproving outright have withheld diplomatic and military support, while neutrals have been hostile. In the Communist camp, existing differences have been further exacerbated and the thawing trend in the Cold War has visibly slowed. Again, the deleterious effects on foreign relations have not taken the form of a demarche by friends or provoked direct countermoves by enemies serious enough to divert the U.S. from pursuing what amounts to virtually a unilateral policy. But international reaction could never be ignored completely.

(S) Throughout, concessions to legality and deference to political sensitivity of any U.S. military undertakings addressed to the Vietnam situation served to restrain too overt an involvement initially and too precipitous an increase later. The U.S. went to considerable lengths to maintain appearances. Preserving the fiction of passive military assistance and support, as opposed to actively engaging in combat operations, was a keystone of America's policy posture well into 1965. Even after the pretense was no longer tenable, efforts were made to justify the deployment of additional combat units as a defensive measure to protect forces already present. Formal observance of legalistic proprieties is much in evidence, both preparatory to major new commitments and to rationalize them once made.

(C) Thus, from several points of view, the ramifications of the Vietnam problem displayed certain disturbing equivocal aspects, while

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the U.S. purpose in relation to it was controversial and not without ambivalence. In both respects, it was conducive to a circumspect approach on the part of the Administration, especially when it came to dealing with the concrete issues posed by an interminable succession of requirements for deploying ever more forces.

(S) In sum, U.S. policy toward the Vietnam war as reflected in force commitments has been constantly on the defensive. Contextual considerations have been largely determining in shaping the scale, type, and pace of U.S. response, rather than the actual conditions and unfolding events of the Vietnam military situation itself. A complex of implications before the fact served as a rein to check and delimit the range of viable military options open to the Administration. These generally operated against expanding the U.S. military role. Deployments accordingly have occurred in a climate of constraints exerting powerful influences that tended always to be in the direction of editing downward and postponing what would be sent, how much, and when.

ORIGINS AND BACKGROUND

(C) The basic U.S. commitment began modestly a decade and a half earlier in the heat of the Cold War. Its genesis can be traced back to 8 May 1950, almost two months before the outbreak of the Korean conflict. At that time the U.S. announced military and economic aid to the nominally independent states of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, comprising the reorganized French Indo-China. It was part of America's containment response to worldwide Communist expansionism, which in the case of Southeast Asia was then seen as being embodied in the Viet Minh movement. A Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) Indo-China was established, and military aid, confined almost exclusively to logistic support in the form of equipment, supplies, and funds, was provided through the French. By 1954 U.S. aid was covering two-thirds of the cost of the Indo-China war.

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(U). Upon the dissolution of French hegemony and the partitioning of Vietnam following the 1954 Geneva Conference, the U.S. undertook to continue military aid to the Republic of Vietnam directly, and in 1955 MAAG Indo-China was redesignated MAAG Vietnam.¹ With the withdrawal of the last French troops in 1956, MAAG Vietnam also assumed responsibility for training and advising the South Vietnamese armed forces, in addition to furnishing materiel and financial support. The U.S. military presence remained small, limited to staff and technical personnel. As late as the end of 1960, despite the launching of systematic insurgency the previous year, U.S. in-country strength numbered less than 750.

(S) In the spring of 1961, the Kennedy administration, reacting to the serious proportions that the VC insurgency was taking -- and the related deteriorating situation in Laos -- decided to increase U.S. support of Vietnam. Following a visit to the country by Vice President Johnson in early May, the U.S. began to expand military assistance and enlarge the role of military advisors. In-country strength at year's end doubled, reaching approximately 1400. Late 1961 also saw significant decisions changing the nature of the U.S. commitment in other ways.

(TS) Conditions had failed to improve through the summer of 1961. The realization that indirect aid measures were insufficient prompted the next stage of U.S. involvement. That fall, decisions were made to furnish limited U.S. combat support for the Vietnamese armed forces under the guise of training and airlift assistance. In October the NSC agreed to deploy a special USAF counterinsurgency squadron called JUNGLE JIM, ostensibly for combat crew training of Vietnamese, that consisted of C-47, B-26, and T-28 aircraft manned by U.S. personnel. In the same NSC action the President also decided

¹ Its euphemized counterpart in Laos, in deference to the terms of the Geneva Accords, was "Program Evaluation Office," created in 1955, but no equivalent was established for Cambodia.

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to send retired General Maxwell Taylor to Vietnam to see what else could be done about the military situation.¹

(TS) The following month, as a result of recommendations by the Taylor mission, the NSC acted in favor of further increasing U.S. combat support, particularly to provide ARVN greater mobility. Approved were more USAF troop transports and U.S. Army airlift elements, as well as personnel and equipment for air reconnaissance, photography, and instruction in air-ground support techniques.² Another recommendation growing out of the Taylor mission was for a U.S. military force in-country numbering somewhere on the order of 8000, which would be primarily support troops yet have a self-defense combat capability. The initial overt purpose would be ostensibly for flood-control assistance, but the force would be retained indefinitely in order to constitute a substantial U.S. military presence. The rationale was that it would have a salutary effect on morale and internal stability, have deterrent value, and in an emergency could be employed in a combat role to support Vietnamese troops if necessary. Details were never refined, however, and, like similar proposals during that period for a U.S. military presence, nothing came of the suggestion.

(TS) Implementation of the late 1961 decision to provide combat support meant a break with the Geneva Accords of 1954, both with respect to limits governing the kind of support permitted and ceilings imposed on U.S. personnel. Thereafter, U.S. in-country strength would steadily rise. Despite the rate of increase, the total nevertheless remained relatively low during this entire transitional period compared to what it would become with the commencement of the great buildup of 1965.

(TS) Arrival of the JUNGLE JIM squadron in January 1962 marked

¹NSAM 104, 13 October 1961, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

²NSAM 111, 22 November 1961, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

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the first introduction of an organized U.S. military operational unit into South Vietnam. It was shortly followed by three U.S. Army helicopter companies and light aircraft aviation elements, plus other combat service support and logistic contingents of varying size. Later a USMC Task Unit (SHUFLY) of approximately 700 personnel, comprised mostly of a helicopter squadron for support of ARVN ground operations, was added. By early spring of 1962, U.S. in-country strength was up to more than 5000. As additional organized units and individual personnel augmentations were brought in, the figure climbed to over 10,000 at year's end and was still growing.

(S) A U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam (USMACV) had been activated in February 1962, underscoring the fact that a turning point had been passed opening a new phase in the U.S. commitment. It was largely for the purpose of exercising effective operational control over the burgeoning activities of U.S. forces that the new command was created. MAAG Vietnam was retained and continued to perform conventional MAAG functions more or less autonomously, but now in a subordinate relationship to the Commander, USMACV (COMUSMACV), until the MAAG was inactivated in May 1964 and its mission responsibility and personnel were incorporated as an integral part of MACV.

(S) Meanwhile, a related U.S. military commitment was evolving in Thailand where U.S. forces were also being deployed during the same period. MAAG Thailand had been activated in October 1950, and later converted into a JUSMAG. At the height of the Laotian crisis in May 1962 a sizeable contingent of U.S. forces, composed of Army, Air Force, and Marine Corps elements totaling approximately 5000, was dispatched to the country, at which time JUSMAG Thailand was placed under COMUSMACV. Gradual withdrawal of ground combat units began in July of the same year, but some 2500 Air Force and Army personnel, as well as stockpiles of war materiel, were retained. In late October 1962 COMUSMACV assumed the added title of

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COMUSMACTHAI, with CHJUSMAG Thailand designated his deputy as DEPCOMUSMACTHAI.

(S) The 2500 strength figure in Thailand held more or less constant for the next two years, except for a temporary introduction of some 7000 U.S. troops in connection with SEATO-sponsored maneuvers in June 1963, who left at the conclusion of the exercise. In August 1964, hard on the Tonkin Gulf incident, more Air Force combat forces and equipment and additional Army support units were assigned. From then on Thailand deployments were geared to developments in the Vietnam war. In-country strength increased significantly: at the end of 1964 it was up to 6500 (mostly Army and Air Force); by July of the following year, after two additional U.S. Air Force fighter squadrons and various other aircraft were brought in, to 10,300; and over 14,000 as of December 1965.

(S) Subordination to COMUSMACV was terminated in mid-1965 when USMACTHAI was separated from COMUSMACV and established as an independent command in its own right. Although force levels further rose substantially thereafter, the U.S. military presence in Thailand never attained anything like the magnitude of that in Vietnam.

(TS) In Vietnam itself, through 1963 the U.S. combat support role, admittedly under various covers, grew apace and more forces were involved. U.S. units were provided to perform tasks that the Vietnamese were incapable of doing themselves. Progressively the operational activities expanded and some took on a quasi-tactical character. Chief among these support programs employing organized units of U.S. military personnel were: FARMGATE (air combat training), MULE TRAIN (airlift), RANCH HAND (defoliation), use of helicopter companies to transport ARVN troops, light aircraft for observation, communications, engineer functions, and various service support and logistic activities. In October the SecDef and General Taylor, the then Chairman of the JCS, after visiting Vietnam at President Kennedy request, reported that prospects were improving. They saw the major

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part of the U.S. military task completed by the end of 1965, and even forecast withdrawal of a thousand U.S. personnel by December of 1963. It was so publicly announced at the time, and indeed more than a thousand technically were rotated back, but the closing U.S. strength figure for December 1963 nevertheless totaled almost 16,000. It continued to rise the following year without a break.

(TS) Piecemeal through 1963 and on into 1964 the support concept began to erode in practice. Gradually, the helicopters came to be armed and "defended" themselves more and more aggressively, eventually becoming shooting platforms used in a close air support role. Advisory personnel preemptively fired back in anticipation of being fired upon. And the pretense of air combat training tended to turn into a transparent subterfuge, with U.S. crews manning aircraft and engaging directly in tactical air actions against enemy forces as long as a Vietnamese was aboard. Some clandestine paramilitary operations became in effect an exclusively U.S. enterprise. Nonetheless, the fiction of support was maintained, and the scope and scale of permitted U.S. participation in operational activities were both selective and severely limited for some considerable time longer.

(TS) In 1964 a noticeable decline in the Vietnam situation set in once more, which had a delayed reaction resulting in U.S. strength going up sharply later in the year. In the spring the prognosis had been at best ambivalent, but the more optimistic side of the appraisal was adopted as a basis for continuing U.S. policy on its present course. At the NSC session of 17 March the President formally approved a SecDef report, dated 16 March, acknowledging that the situation "has unquestionably grown worse, at least since December," yet which still optimistically stated, "Substantial reductions in the numbers of U.S. military training personnel should be possible before the end of 1965." No change in the U.S. support role was advocated

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and no direct involvement of U.S. combat forces was accordingly considered.¹

(S) One effect of the optimism of late 1963 and the first half of 1964 was to prejudice U.S. planning and preparatory measures for possible increased deployments, reflected especially in a cutback in building up a logistics base in Vietnam. The consequences were to be felt before the year was out, and the loss of valuable lead-time in this regard would be a serious handicap for the next year or more.

THE 1964 EXPANSION OF THE ADVISORY EFFORT

(C) As the military situation in Vietnam failed to show signs of ameliorating, pressures began to develop in early summer of 1964 for a significant increase in U.S. forces, albeit still in the policy context of support. Predicated essentially upon a rationale of more of the same, this eventually led to what became the last major deployment effort of the transitional period and helped usher in the change to the coming new phase of direct involvement. The experience anticipated in microcosm many features that would later characterize the circumstances, problems, and frustrations attending the great buildup shortly to get under way.

(S) A special meeting on Southeast Asia was called at PACOM Headquarters in Honolulu for 1-2 June because of the unsatisfactory progress in execution of the National Pacification Plan. There COMUSMACV proposed extending and intensifying the U.S. advisory effort in order to improve the operational effectiveness of the VNAF performance generally. The idea was discussed and supported in principle, and a staff working paper outlining the concept was prepared by the conferees. Near the end of June COMUSMACV submitted

¹NSAM No. 288, 17 March 1964, TOP SECRET.

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to JCS (info CINCPAC, DOD, State, White House) his formal proposal recommending enlargement of the advisory assistance program. He reiterated, and offered further justification for, the need to augment the current advisory detachments at the battalion level and to extend the advisory effort at both the district and sector levels. His detailed breakout of primary personnel requirements came to a total of 900 more advisors as the net in-country increase, but conceded that additional administrative and logistic support requirements would be substantial and would be submitted separately. Also, approximately 80 additional U.S. Navy advisors would be requested, in connection with recommendations made earlier in the "Bucklew Report" for a Junk Force and other measures to counter infiltration by sea. CINCPAC indicated concurrence and recommended approval of the proposal on 4 July.¹

(S) In the middle of July the new U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam, General Maxwell Taylor, sent an evaluation of the military situation to the SecState, SecDef, and JCS that lent strong support to COMUSMACV's proposal. The Ambassador advised that formal estimates of VC strength in South Vietnam had been revised and now were raised to between 28,000 and 34,000. He explained that this did not reflect a sudden dramatic increase, but had been suspected for the past two or three years, though confirmatory evidence had become available only in the last few months. There was thus no occasion for alarm, but the new estimate emphasized the growing magnitude of the problem and the need to increase the level of U.S./GVN efforts. Therefore, additional requirements were being formulated, including U.S. military personnel requirements, to support U.S. plans during the ensuing months to cope with the new understanding of the realities of

¹Working Paper, Special Meeting on Southeast Asia, Hq. PACOM, 1-2 June 1964, Extension of U.S. Advisory Assistance in RVN, 2 June 1964, SECRET; Msg COMUSMACV MACJ 325380 to JCS, info DOD, State (Sullivan), White House (Forrestal), CINCPAC, DA, 250005Z Jun 64, S; Msg COMUSMACV MACJ 325580 to CINCPAC info JCS 272357Z Jun 64, S; JCS 2343/336, S; Msg CINCPAC to JCS 042320Z Jul 64, S.

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the situation. He forecast an increase in U.S. military strength to around 21,000 over the next six-month period to meet projected needs.¹

(S) Immediately the size of the estimated force requirements connected with the proposed extension of the advisory effort began to climb. On 16 July COMUSMACV submitted the support requirements associated with the program. For the next year he would need, over and above the original 900 additional advisors requested, more than 3200 other personnel, for a total gross military strength increase of about 4200. These related support requirements included a Special Forces Group (later established as 1299 personnel), one additional squadron of C-123s to augment the Southeast Asia airlift, one additional company of U.S. Army CARIBOU aircraft, and 11 helicopter companies (or squadrons) for support of ARVN tactical units.²

(S) Support requirements as they were further refined continued to grow thereafter. By August the 4200 figure reached over 4800, plus additional personnel on TDY, and was still inching upward as secondary requirements were identified. For example, late in July COMUSMACV requested 177 additional personnel (and equipment) for an air support request control network. This was followed in August by recommendations for additional communication support for the expanding advisory effort, the total new requirement coming to 244 personnel, plus vehicles and equipment, as well as more contract civilians being needed. Then, because of the in-country buildup in U.S. forces, a requirement was established for increasing general service support personnel by 166 (administrative, medical, POL, finance, etc.).³ Eventually the cumulative magnitude of increase

¹Msg Am Embassy Saigon to SecState (Taylor to Rusk and McNamara) info JCS and CINCPAC 150900Z Jul 65, S.

²Msg COMUSMACV to CINCPAC info JCS MACJ-31 6180 161045Z Jul 64, S.

³Msg COMUSMACV MACJ3 6414 to CINCPAC 210903Z Jul 64, S; Msg CINCPAC to JCS 252102Z Jul 64, S; Msg COMUSMACV MACJ3 7242 to CINCPAC info JCS 011139Z Aug 64, S; Msg COMUSMACV MACJ 7212 to CINCPAC info JCS 010255Z Aug 64, S.

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attained a level that in turn of its own weight generated yet another order of less directly related logistic support requirements later in the year.

(S) The extent of these creeping ancillary requirements soon prompted attention, and more systematic procedures were laid down regarding their initiation and processing. A JCS staff study was undertaken, which classified new manpower requirements as falling into three categories -- Joint Table of Distribution (JTD) changes, new Service units to be introduced, and augmentation of existing component units already in country -- and set up a method to ensure centralized control in dealing with each. Near the end of August, accordingly, the JCS, after coordination with OSD agencies and the Services, instructed that henceforth the following outlined procedure would be adhered to by all concerned for handling any contemplated increases in MACV personnel strength:

- a. JTD changes and new unit requirements -- proposed increases would be forwarded through CINCPAC-JCS channels, and thence to the SecDef for approval.
- b. In-country component unit augmentation requirements -- requests for such augmentation would be forwarded through CINCPAC-Service channels, and thence directly to the Assistant SecDef (Manpower) for approval, but keeping the JCS advised.¹

In practice, the many exceptions and departures violating these procedures, at various echelons, soon reduced the system again to one of ad hoc informality. Much later, well after the great buildup was under way, efforts were made once more to impose a new procedural system, which also failed to regularize the generating and processing of force requirements.

¹JCS 2343/431, S; Msg JCS 8053 to CINCPAC, CSA, CNO, CSAF, CMC, info COMUSMACV 241851Z Aug 64, C.

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(S) Meanwhile the basic program for expansion of the advisory effort and its related support requirements gained rapid acceptance. The Ambassador in Saigon concurred in COMUSMACV's proposed increase in U.S. military strength by 4200 over the next nine months, bringing the total in-country to nearly 22,000; and he urged prompt action. The SecState also recommended approval, as did CINCPAC and JCS, and on 20 July, at the JCS-SecDef meeting, overall support was given to the COMUSMACV requested deployment package. The following day, at the NSC meeting of 21 July, the President gave it final approval.¹

(S) Even before a formal national decision was reached, COMUSMACV had requested that the C-123 squadron be deployed as soon as possible. Given as justification was that a fourth squadron was needed because the present three squadrons in-country were consistently overflying their programmed hours per aircraft already, and greater airlift demands were anticipated in connection with the expected increase in forces. CINCPAC passed the request on (through CNO) and the JCS asked CINCSTRIKE for his reactions. CINCSTRIKE stated that, although it would result in further dissipation of airlift capability for the CONUS strategic reserve and severely reduce his quick-reaction forces available for contingencies, he could provide the required squadron. Whereupon, on 15 August, the JCS directed deployment of the C-123 squadron to South Vietnam to arrive by 1 November. At the same time, additional airlift (C-130s) would also be made available to COMUSMACV on a TDY basis.²

¹Msg Am Emb Saigon to SecState info White House, DOD, JCS, CINCPAC 171210Z Jul 64, S; Msg CINCPAC to JCS 200036Z Jul 64, S; Msg SecState 205 to Am Emb Saigon 21 Jul 64, TS; Msg JCS 7492 to CINCPAC 211917Z Jul 64, S; Briefing Sheet for CJCS, 3 Aug 64, S.

²Msg COMUSMACV J32 6180 to CINCPAC 161045Z Jul 64, S; Msg CINCPAC to CNO 170901Z Jul 64 (repeated to JCS 171024Z Jul 64) S; Msg CINCSTRIKE to JCS 011952Z Aug 64, S; Msg JCS 7953 to CINCSTRIKE CSAF et al 151727Z Aug 64, S.

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(S) In the course of executing the decision and implementing the deployments, however, several major problems were encountered. One was an inter-Service doctrine issue regarding the large number of U.S. Army aircraft involved. Another was the dislocating impact on Service resources, as already noted in the case of the fourth C-123 squadron. A third concerned accelerating the time phase schedule of movements for the forces to be deployed.

(S) Following through on the heels of the Presidential decision in favor of the expanded advisory program, the JCS requested COMUSMACV to prepare detailed specifications of how he wanted his requirements met. In response COMUSMACV submitted an incremental breakout comprehensively listing all requirements by Service and giving the schedule for each unit. The pace of deployments would be stretched out so that some increments would not arrive in Vietnam until February 1965. He also included construction requirements for logistical support of the additional forces. CINCPAC indicated his concurrence. The JCS also went along and so recommended to the SecDef. At the same time, they advised the SecDef that the Services would be forced to make critical adjustments in their manpower posture to accommodate COMUSMACV's unprogrammed requirements for more forces. The JCS therefore recommended that Service manpower ceilings be increased to reflect these new requirements.¹

(S) As it soon proved, COMUSMACV had in a sense oversold his case on the need for the force increase. On 31 July, at a meeting between OSD/ISA and Joint Staff (J-3) representatives, the JCS were apprised of the fact that the SecDef was contemplating accelerating the introduction of the requested additional forces for MACV so as to have all deployed units close by 30 Sept 1964. The JCS were therefore

¹Msg JCS 7574 to COMUSMACV 252136Z Jul 64, S; Msg COMUSMACV MACJ1 7044 to JCS 281229Z Jul 54, S; Msg CINCPAC to JCS 010443 Aug 64, S; JCSM 632-64 for SecDef 31 Jul 64, S; JCS 2428/360-5, S.

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requested to examine the ability of the Services to meet this advanced date and to determine the implications of such acceleration.¹

(S) It was quickly established that the Services could do it, but at a price. The CSA reported that the Army was capable of making the necessary units available in time. As for implications, doing so would affect to some extent overall training and readiness of Army forces but was expected to have minimal impact on the Army's air mobile test programs then being conducted. Implications for the Air Force were far more serious. The CSAF reported that training of those USAF personnel presently programmed for Vietnam would not be completed before December 1964. To deploy the entire Air Liaison Officer/Forward Air Controller (ALO/FAC) package requested by COMUSMACV within the accelerated time frame would exhaust all such assets available in CONUS, depleting the existing inventory of organized ALO/FAC teams in STRICOM to the point of reducing this capability to zero. Moreover, aircraft shortages would have deleterious impact on CONUS training generally and on readiness to meet contingencies. Finally, there would also be serious degradation of MATS traffic resulting from diverting so much of its resources for the necessary air movement of all these augmentation forces if they were to be in Vietnam by the date indicated.²

(S) Meanwhile, before questions of schedule feasibility and impact on Services could be resolved, a more fundamental issue was raised. The CSAF challenged the validity of the basic requirement for so much U.S. Army aviation. Implied, by virtue of sheer size alone, were controversial assumptions touching upon Service mission and roles, doctrine, and strategic concepts. COMUSMACV had spelled out his requirement for additional U.S. Army aviation and

¹JCS 2343/431, S.

²CSAM 411-64 for JCS 4 Aug 64, S; DJSM-1355-64 for SecDef 6 Aug 64, S; DJSM-1349-64 for Asst SecDef (ISA) 5 Aug 64 S; JCS 2343/431, S.

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aviation support units in explicit terms, along with a detailed justification, and had reiterated the requirement with emphasis. It came to an aggregate of 1110 personnel (later proved actually to be 1306 when support personnel were included) and involved a total of 106 aircraft (16 CARIBOU CV-2Bs, 77 tactical-type helicopters, and 13 support helicopters). The requirement had been coordinated with, and expressly concurred in by both CINCPAC and Ambassador Taylor.¹

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¹Msg COMUSMACV MACJ-312 6433 to CINCPAC info JCS, State, White House, in Emb Saigon 211745Z Jul 64, S.

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(S) Accordingly, on 4 August, the JCS forwarded a qualified deployment recommendation to the SecDef. They first stated that the Services were capable of meeting accelerated introduction of increased support forces into South Vietnam by 30 September from current resources, but advised that it would be at the expense of some degradation in military posture, particularly serious interference with Service training, testing, and combat readiness, because of presently existing personnel and equipment limitations. They nevertheless recommended that authority be granted to deploy forthwith the forces as requested by COMUSMACV, with the exception of the helicopter augmentation and the additional CV-2B CARIBOU company [

] until the issue of their intended use was resolved. At the same time the JCS also requested that funds be released for the new construction requirements generated by these deployments. And again, they repeated their earlier recommendation that an increase in Service manpower ceilings be approved to accommodate these MACV unprogrammed force requirements.¹

(S) On that very day, 4 August (and carrying over into the 5th), occurred the Tonkin Gulf episode, an incident that later proved to have been a significant milestone, if not one of the turning points, in the war. It altered the military role of the U.S., at least briefly for the time, and had important dimensions of its own bearing directly on deployments. In connection with the U.S. retaliatory air action that was adopted, certain [] forces (mainly tactical fighter squadrons and naval units) were temporarily moved to forward positions in Southeast Asia, including some USAF jet aircraft placed in South Vietnam. Though there for contingency purposes, to deter or deal with any subsequent enemy reactions on the part of the DRV or ChiComs, these combat units were retained but were forbidden to engage in combat operations. Thus, a

¹JCSM 665-64 for SecDef 4 Aug 64, S.

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fortuitous conjuncture of circumstances lent the JCS deployment proposal for the MACV advisory program a timely immediacy. The climate was propitious, and the Washington decision atmosphere unusually receptive and favorably disposed. In fact, on 7 August, the House and Senate passed a Joint Congressional Resolution, requested by the President, giving prior sanction to any measures taken by the President to repel aggression against U.S. forces.¹

(S) In short order over the next two days following receipt of the JCS deployment recommendation the SecDef, conferring with OSD agencies, the CJCS, Service Secretaries, and the White House, readily obtained the necessary concurrence and approval. On 7 August he formally rendered a decision, in the process resolving most of the outstanding issues involved. He had determined that the consequences of acceleration on the posture and readiness of the Services were acceptable, in view of the urgency of the need in Vietnam. In his response to the JCS he therefore directed preparation of the units for deployment accordingly, and instructed the JCS to advise COMUSMACV that, with certain exceptions, most of his force requirement would be available to him in-country by 30 September. He then suggested the JCS find out if MACV could absorb them within that time frame. Regarding the JCS disagreement on the controversial Army aviation requirement, he ruled in favor of the Army, i.e., that the additional helicopters and the CARIBOU company would be supplied to MACV as requested, albeit perhaps somewhat delayed. He also approved release of funds for construction purposes associated with these deployments. As for the recommended raising of Service manpower ceilings, however, the SecDef chose to hold his decision in abeyance for the time being and consider the question separately later.²

¹Technically it was considered at the time a reconfirmation of authority that legally the President already possessed.

²Memo SecDef for CJCS 7 Aug 64, S.

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(S) The following day the JCS informed CINCPAC and COMUSMACV of the SecDef's decision. They advised that the deployments were being accelerated so that the bulk of all units, personnel, and equipment would be in South Vietnam and available to COMUSMACV by 30 September 1964. Comments were requested on the effects of such acceleration of these deployments.¹

(S) COMUSMACV was somewhat taken aback by this unexpected over-responsiveness to his requirement with respect to the accelerated pace at which forces would be provided. After coordinating with the Ambassador in Saigon, he replied at considerable length to explain why this was inadvisable. Stating that he "strongly recommends against" compressing to 30 September the time schedule for arrival of the augmentation forces, he listed the following reasons:

a. Airfield facilities were currently saturated with

[] forces temporarily prepositioned in South Vietnam (as well as elsewhere in Southeast Asia and WESTPAC).

b. New construction of reception facilities (ports, camps, transportation, etc.), to accommodate the additional personnel would not be ready, inasmuch as an interval of at least five months time from starting date was necessary to complete them.

c. The limited support infrastructure presently available would be overtaxed by crowding so many new personnel within such a short period, whereas the earlier proposed phasing allowed for orderly and manageable coordination of the force buildup consonant with improvements in the support base.

d. The command would be unable to provide the necessary in-country training for so many forces at such a speeded-up rate, even for the advisors alone.

¹Msg JCS 7816 to CINCPAC, COMUSMACV et al 0819492 Aug 64, S.

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e. Since operational phasing-in of the advisors and their supporting elements had to be in pace with the progress of pacification in the districts, all were not needed so soon.

f. The entire logistical and administrative base, already overburdened, did not have the surge capacity to absorb this magnitude of force augmentation (at this point approximately 4900 personnel) in such a short time.

g. Even if it were feasible, the result would be a cyclical turnover hump of undesirable proportions recurring at the same time annually because of personnel rotation policies.

In sum, compression would cause overload problems beyond MACV capabilities to handle in an orderly manner and would thus prove counter-productive. COMUSMACV closed by indicating that the Ambassador agreed with the view expressed.¹

(S) CINCPAC immediately followed in concurring, and recommended that COMUSMACV's original phase-in schedule be adhered to in the interests of an orderly buildup. He too cited the limitations in in-country capability to provide construction and other logistical facilities essential to optimum reception and utilization of the new forces upon arrival. He explained further that the U.S. cannot commandeer local assets but must deal with and through the South Vietnamese Government, which, he pointed out, is a slow process.²

(S) The JCS, meeting on the 14th, were readily convinced. They determined that COMUSMACV's original schedule should be essentially the one followed rather than trying to meet the 30 September deadline. The SecDef was so informed and in turn also agreed to let the time phasing revert back largely as first planned. Whereupon, on 15 August the JCS instructed all concerned that the original phase-in schedule,

¹Msg COMUSMACV MACJ3 7738 to CINCPAC info JCS et al, 111049Z Aug 64, S.

²Msg CINCPAC to JCS 120322Z Aug 64, S.

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with certain indicated exceptions (e.g., the fourth C-123 squadron's ETA previously moved forward to 1 November-to stand) would be adhered to. They directed implementation of the deployments accordingly.¹

(S) As the deployments were carried out and the numbers of U.S. forces rose substantially, a secondary force requirement devolving from that increase emerged. In November COMUSMACV was compelled to request an organized Logistics Command for South Vietnam and a U.S. Army Engineer Construction Group, which together totaled some 4500 more men, almost as many as were involved in the primary advisory expansion program itself. The new derivative requirement was not approved immediately nor deployment authorized until much later. The two units arrived in late spring and early summer of 1965.

(S) By the close of 1964 the year-end U.S. strength figure had climbed to approximately 23,000² and further authorized deployments were under way or in preparation. Of the total in-country, some 14,500 were U.S. Army troops, approximately 7100 were USAF, a little over 1100 Navy and about 885 USMC. In addition there were token Free World Military Assistance Forces of other Allies serving in a strictly noncombatant capacity that together totaled another 380, most from the Republic of Korea and Australia, but including nominal representation from New Zealand, the Philippines, Nationalist China, and Thailand.

¹Memo CM-80-64 for SecDef 14 Aug 64, S; Msg JCS to CINCPAC, CINCSRIKE et al, 151727Z Aug 64, S.

²In-country strength figures vary widely depending on source. Discrepancies are accounted for by different standards for computing totals according to technical administrative distinctions in personnel assignment, e.g., Joint Table of Distribution (JTD), Permanent Change of Station (PCS), Temporary Duty (TDY), in transit, replacement and deployment pipelines, rotational status, rest and recuperation, medical evacuation, etc. The foregoing figures have been derived largely from "Fact Sheet on U.S. Force Commitments to Vietnam," 8 Apr 65, prepared by J-3 PAC Div, Joint Staff, for Special Assistant to SecDef (Mr. Califano) TOP SECRET, as reconciled with figures cited in other JCS documentary sources and those of COMUSMACV, CINCPAC, and the Services. Subsequent strength totals are also averaged out into best estimates.

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(C) In the interim, however, through the summer and fall of 1964 the military situation in South Vietnam had continued to deteriorate, despite the U.S. combat support and the expansion of the advisory effort. The larger part of the countryside was under enemy control and the military and political viability of the Government was in precarious straits. Thus, well before the current round of deployment programs was completed the entire advisory and support strategy -- as well as its rationale and attendant issues -- was on its way to being overtaken by events and overshadowed by more far-reaching deployment developments flowing from them. By then the nature and degree of U.S. commitment was in process of undergoing profound change and about to enter a new phase. The beginnings of a fundamental transformation in the role of U.S. forces was already in train. Though it would take several more months to find direction and gain momentum, it would eventually culminate in the great buildup that was imminent but as yet unsuspected and unwanted. Throughout, it would be the deployments of military personnel, reflecting ad hoc responses to particular demands of the war, that would give form de facto to an emerging new U.S. policy.

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CHAPTER II

INTRODUCTION OF U.S. GROUND COMBAT FORCES

(TS) One of the critical departures changing the character of the U.S. role in the Vietnam conflict was the introduction of U.S. ground combat forces in the spring and summer of 1965. The exact event is difficult to isolate and fix in time. It was not a deliberate single act. Rather than occurring as a crisp decision juncture, both the circumstances and the decision were somewhat amorphous, emerging episodically over a period of time. The basic decision took fully five months to crystallize. Only in retrospect does it stand out as a significant turning point.

(S) The motivation for committing ground combat forces began modestly as a more or less precautionary measure only and was incidental to another course of action. The original purpose soon changed, however, and actual deployment of most of the forces was in response to a perceived real and immediate requirement in its own right. Ultimately a massive commitment was made in order to maintain the U.S. military position in South Vietnam and to preserve U.S. policy posture in SEA.

EMERGENCE OF TWO PARALLEL INDEPENDENT REQUIREMENTS FOR FORCES

(TS) The genesis of the buildup lay in two different currents that surfaced late in 1964 and converged in early 1965. The war was not going well. At the root of the problem was North Vietnam's growing support of the VC, including large-scale infiltration of DRV troops and supplies. To cope with the worsening situation the U.S. decided to cut off the source of VC strength by discouraging the outside support. A policy of graduated military pressures directly against North Vietnam was adopted in December 1964, the

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upper range of which called for air strikes against DRV targets.

(25) As the new program gained form, however, military considerations of possible enemy reaction had to be taken into account. One consequence might be the triggering of overt intervention by DRV and ChiCom forces in reprisal for U.S. escalation of the war. There were already fears that they were preparing to enter and this might provide both the provocation and excuse to do so. Accordingly, the desirability of having U.S. combat forces in South Vietnam was recognized as a necessary adjunct to any contemplated military action against North Vietnam. From a military point of view the justification was sound and cogent. From a political point of view it was fraught with untold kinds of possible undesired repercussions.

(25) On 5 January 1965, CINCPAC, at the suggestion of COMUSMACV, first raised the proposal of deploying U.S. ground forces in the context of the planned air operations. In a message to the JCS, he advised that it would be prudent to have a U.S. division force, perhaps augmented by Allied troops, positioned just south of the DMZ. Its presence would serve as a deterrent to ward off any notions of open invasion should the enemy be so tempted.¹ The contingency purpose was justified essentially on strategic grounds.

(25) Meanwhile, what proved to be a related second current was developing from another quarter in a more specific tactical vein. Within South Vietnam the internal military situation seriously deteriorated through the latter part of 1964. In a climate of continuing domestic political instability the will and effectiveness of the RVNAF were eroding. In contrast the enemy was in the ascendancy, its in-country strength steadily improving. By the first of the year the inverse progression in respective capabilities had degraded the South Vietnamese military position to a point where it clearly was no

¹Msg, CINCPAC to JCS 050740Z Jan 65, TS.

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match for the VC. Not only had ARVN forces suffered a series of defeats in engagements, but they were demonstrably unable to contend with the stepped-up campaign of guerrilla terrorism. Large areas of the countryside, especially in the north, were under enemy control.

(TS) There was thus cause for concern over the security of the substantial U.S. commitment in support forces and resources already present in South Vietnam. Responsibility for security of U.S. personnel and facilities rested on the Vietnamese armed forces, who no longer could be relied upon to provide adequate local defense. Indeed, U.S. installations were experiencing terrorist attacks with increasing frequency. In fact, late in January COMUSMACV was prompted to request an Army military police battalion to help protect U.S. headquarters complexes in Saigon and elsewhere.¹ Approved by the JCS on 18 February,² the MP battalion arrived during the period 19-21 March, with the bulk of the unit being stationed in the Saigon area.³ But the problem was one involving far more than police-type security. It had taken on a tactical dimension, was widespread, and growing worse. This state of affairs was precisely the reason for taking action against North Vietnam in the first place.

(TS) Here the two currents came together. If the U.S. bombed North Vietnam, the vulnerability of U.S. installations, such as the important base complex around Da Nang in the north, would offer inviting opportunities for enemy reprisal, either to be overrun by DRV/ChiCom invasion or subjected to terrorist attacks by the VC. Both the long-range strategic need for deterrence and the immediate tactical requirements of local security set the stage for introducing U.S. ground combat forces into South Vietnam.

DETERRENCE/CONTINGENCY REQUIREMENTS

(TS) Specifically, it was ROLLING THUNDER, the sustained eight-

¹Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC and JCS, 221143Z Jan 65, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

²JCS 2343/524 TOP SECRET.

³Hq USMACV Command History 1965, 20 April 66, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

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week program of increasingly severe air strikes against DRV targets, that precipitated the first ground combat deployment:

(TS) On 1 February, when ROLLING THUNDER planning was still in the developmental stage, and a month before its execution began, the CSA submitted a proposal to the JCS in more explicit terms for deploying ground forces as an integral part of the program of stepped-up military pressures against North Vietnam about to get under way. Presented as a national policy proposal, the rationale was twofold: the very act of deploying such forces would itself enhance, in a complementary mode, the credibility of the rhetorical effect sought, namely, signaling U.S. intent; presence of the troops, moreover, was required to avert or meet repercussions flowing from the new U.S. course of action. His general recommendation was to deploy a force of about reinforced division size to South Vietnam and of one to two divisions to Thailand. Specifically designated units to constitute part of these forces were one MEB from Okinawa to be positioned in the crucial Da Nang area, plus the 173rd Airborne Brigade from Okinawa elsewhere in South Vietnam, and initially one U.S. Army brigade of the 25th Infantry Division to be moved from Hawaii to Thailand (followed by the remainder of the division).¹ The units named were in accordance with existing contingency plans []

[] though by no means representing all that were provided for therein.

(TS) A few days later, during the FLAMING DART operation launched in retaliation for the Pleiku incident, some of the above-designated contingency forces were affected. A Marine SLF and another BLT were forward deployed afloat and held in readiness off the South Vietnam coast, while the 173rd Airborne Brigade was placed on quick-reaction alert for movement to South Vietnam by air. Also in connection with FLAMING DART, part of a Marine LAAM battalion (HAWK) was

¹CSAM 36-15 for JCS, 1 Feb 65, TOP SECRET.

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deployed from Okinawa to Da Nang to provide antiaircraft defense. The F-102 aircraft already there could meet the medium- and high-altitude threat and the HAWK surface-to-air missile provided the needed low-altitude capability.¹

(TS) On the heels of the execution of FLAMING DART, in the JCS meeting of 8 February, the upcoming air campaign against North Vietnam (ROLLING THUNDER) was discussed at some length. The CSA's deployment proposal of 1 February relating to it was brought up. There was ready agreement on the need for combat ground forces but not on how many. [

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] He directed the JCS to go ahead and prepare a comprehensive plan for the air strike program and suggested that the problem of evaluating the ground force requirement be taken up separately.²

(TS) In the ensuing conferences and reviewing of the draft air-strike plan, provisions were included for deployment of ground combat forces as part of it, although no consensus on the desired size of the force was reached. At the JCS meeting on 10 February, the Chiefs -- less the CSA -- decided on recommending deployment of only a Marine Expeditionary Brigade and an Army Brigade. The CSA still opted strongly for significantly larger ground forces initially and readiness preparations for deploying considerably more if needed.³ The upshot was that when the ROLLING THUNDER plan was submitted to

¹Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC 070229Z Feb 65, ~~TOP SECRET~~; JCS 4760 to CINCPAC 070455Z Feb 65, ~~TOP SECRET~~; JCS 4762 to CINCPAC 071341Z, Feb 65, TOP SECRET; JCS 4766 to CINCPAC 071707Z Feb 65, ~~TOP SECRET~~; Msg CINCPAC to JCS 080711Z Feb 65, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

²JCS 2339/169, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

³CSAM 23-65 for JCS, 10 Feb 65, TS; JCS 2339/170-1, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

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the SecDef on 11 Feb the JCS gave their estimate of probable DRV and ChiCom reactions and recommended, among other things, deployment of one MEB from Okinawa to the Da Nang area in South Vietnam and one U.S. Army Brigade of the 25th Infantry Division from Hawaii to Thailand, citing the original deterrence/contingency justification for the requirement. Also included, however, was a statement of the views of the CSA, to the effect that he was not in agreement with the adequacy of the recommended ground force deployment and that the question was being staffed separately.¹ The ROLLING THUNDER plan was approved, but the timing of its implementation as well as the issue of deployments were left unspecified.

(25) Apprising CINCPAC the next day of the foregoing, the JCS requested an assessment of the desirability and feasibility of additional major deployments to Vietnam, Thailand, and WESTPAC, over and above those contained in the recommendation submitted to the SecDef. It was emphasized that the purpose of deployments was twofold: (1) they were intended to serve as a deterrent, by showing readiness to meet the DRV/ChiCom threat; and (2) they were to be a forward positioning of forces in advance, should deterrence fail.²

(25) CINCPAC queried COMUSMACV and responded to the JCS request on 24 February. In sum, the evaluation from the field was that deployment of additional forces was not necessary at this time.³ Whereupon the JCS advised the SecDef that, having reevaluated the situation in SEA, ChiCom/DRV intervention in reaction to the stepped-up U.S. military pressures against North Vietnam now seemed unlikely. They had determined, therefore, that no additional forces were required to be deployed for deterrence or contingency purposes over and above

¹JCSM 100-65 to SecDef, 11 Feb 65, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

²Msg, JCS 5147 to CINCPAC 122140Z Feb 65, ~~TOP SECRET/LINDIS~~

³Msg, CINCPAC to JCS 240327Z Feb 65, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

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those already contained in their earlier recommendation of 11 February. Included was a recapitulation of total deployment requirements, which remained essentially the same as before. In the case of combat ground forces these were identical, namely, the 9th MEB from Okinawa to Da Nang, one brigade of the 25th Infantry Division from Hawaii to Thailand, and one MEB from Hawaii to WESTPAC to replace the 9th MEB in reconstituting PACOM forward reserve.¹ In effect, a relatively modest requirement had been reconfirmed.

LOCAL SECURITY REQUIREMENTS

(S) Despite the apparent consensus, other considerations by this time were overtaking the deterrence/contingency requirement relating to ROLLING THUNDER. The more immediate problem of local security had begun to assert a dominant influence on ground force requirements generally.

(TS) On 15 February, the Deputy COMUSMACV, after making a personal inspection trip to survey the situation with respect to U.S. facilities at Da Nang, reported to COMUSMACV that the state of local security constituted a hazard. Under present conditions the substantial U.S. investment in men and equipment was left tactically exposed to enemy action to an unacceptable degree. Therefore, because of the vulnerability of this critical base complex and the questionable capability of ARVN to protect it, the MEB was required there now as a security force.² COMUSMACV agreed and on 20 February requested CINCPAC to deploy the 9th MEB from Okinawa to Da Nang as soon as possible. He gave the same reasons as DEPCOMUSMACV, adding that the security situation was deteriorating daily.³

(TS) CINCPAC concurred, as did the JCS in turn, and the matter was taken up by the NCA as an ad hoc requirement considered almost

¹ JCSM 149-65 to SecDef 4 Mar 65, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

² Memo for Record, COMUSMACV MACJ01 1462-65, 15 Feb 65, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

³ Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC 200200Z Feb 65, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

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exclusively on the basis of the immediate issue of local security. Despite the clear and cogent military necessity -- and the earlier approval in principle -- a decision did not come quickly. It was not until 27 February that the JCS notified CINCPAC and COMUSMACV of approval finally having been granted for deployment of the 9th MEB to Da Nang as soon as appropriate arrangements could be made.¹ This, however, still by no means meant that actual deployment of the force was authorized.

(TS) One of the constraints was the political sensitivity that the NCA attached to their decision. They were concerned over the impact that this introduction of a foreign ground combat force on Vietnamese soil would have on the Vietnamese populace. Therefore, because of the fear of possible adverse public and official reaction to what was at this point a purely unilateral U.S. initiative, the Ambassador in Saigon and COMUSMACV were instructed to sound out the Prime Minister and key generals regarding the subject beforehand. The Vietnamese readily agreed, but on condition that when and if U.S. troops were deployed they be brought in as unobtrusively as possible. COMUSMACV so reported just before the launching of the first ROLLING THUNDER air strikes on 2 March.²

(C) All was seemingly now in readiness. Before the deployment could be carried out, however, new situational factors raising more fundamental military issues than the local security requirements of Da Nang began to thrust themselves upon the national decision makers.

(TS) From the various intelligence estimates and evaluation of recent further unfavorable military developments in Vietnam, the NCA now were confronted with the problem of judging whether the situation had perhaps already deteriorated beyond a point where it could be salvaged, regardless of U.S. actions. In Washington a period of

¹Msg, JCS 5736 to CINCPAC and JCS 020455Z Mar 65, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

²Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC and JCS 020455Z Mar 65, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

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agonizing but inconclusive soul searching set in. Groping for the very informational basis for decision, a series of queries soliciting views and recommendations from the field went out to COMUSMACV and CINCPAC, and presumably to the Ambassador as well. The degree of apprehension is best expressed by one message from the Chairman, JCS, on 5 March, which undoubtedly reflected the state of national concern generally. He asked whether deployment of the 9th MEB would any longer be adequate to ensure the security of Da Nang installations, and whether there were any indications of imminent collapse of the GVN war effort.¹ In an earlier message he had also inquired about the military utility of employing U.S. aircraft in combat within South Vietnam in support of ARVN tactical operations to help reduce the losing course of the war.²

(TS) COMUSMACV's response assessed the situation as serious but not hopeless. Indeed the VC were winning. The only thing that could halt the adverse trend and save Vietnam was greater U.S. involvement in the fighting, to the extent of doing whatever was militarily necessary to prevent defeat. Given such a U.S. policy commitment, the long-term prognosis was not pessimistic. With U.S. help such as pre-strike bombings and close air support, the ARVN could survive and eventually, supplemented by U.S. combat units to overcome VC superiority, make a comeback. He recommended full employment of U.S. tactical air resources now, and immediate deployment of the 9th MEB to Da Nang, plus three additional U.S. Army helicopter companies and three companies of Army light observation aircraft.³

(S) This is the earliest record found, from among the isolated instances where the subject is raised at all, that explicitly refers to a basic change in policy toward Vietnam, though here admittedly parenthetical to the express purpose and main thrust of the

¹Msg, JCS 6408 CJCS to COMUSMACV 051807Z Mar 65, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

²Msg, JCS 6347, CJCS to COMUSMACV 041712Z Mar 65, ~~TOP SECRET~~, LINDIS.

³Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 1190 to CJCS Info CINCPAC 060500Z Mar 65, TOP SECRET.

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message. Postulated was a deliberate decision on the part of the U.S. to enter the war directly as a major belligerent on whatever scale was militarily required. There was no follow-through, however, on this the central issue. Instead, only the particular military steps advocated were taken up formally and in due course acted upon. The underlying question of whether the U.S. should or should not embark on an open-ended policy of full military intervention in the war in the South was not addressed as such.

(TS) CINCPAC generally concurred in COMUSMACV's assessment and supported the specific deployment recommendations. He also advocated, among other measures, immediate combat employment of U.S. airpower in South Vietnam and added the proposal that U.S. ground forces be used in security missions.¹

(TS) Two days later, on 8 March, the JCS advised CINCPAC and COMUSMACV that their views and recommendations had been forwarded to the SecDef and were expected to be considered favorably by the NCA.²

(TS) The proposal for using U.S. tactical aircraft in a combat role in South Vietnam, however, was already becoming somewhat academic. It was on the way to being overtaken de facto by gradually expanded interpretation and application of earlier conditional approval. In January the JCS had granted contingency authorization for limited employment of U.S. jet aircraft in support of ARVN in an emergency. The authorization was open-ended, with neither the criteria nor the constraints explicitly circumscribed, but was left to the discretion of COMUSMACV in coordination with the U.S. Ambassador in Saigon. On 19 February COMUSMACV first had occasion to exercise this prepositioned authority in connection with the heavy fighting then raging in the north. Once a precedent was established, U.S. airpower there-

¹Msg CINCPAC to JCS 062235Z Mar 65, TS.

²Msg, JCS 6603 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV 081434Z Mar 65, TS.

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after progressively assumed more and more of a direct tactical role in strike operations against the VC in South Vietnam. By the end of March close air support of ARVN was being conducted on a fairly regular basis.¹ Nevertheless, it was some time before a point was reached where the relatively unrestricted full exploitation of U.S. air resources contemplated by CINCPAC and COMUSMACV actually became a reality. The specific issue apparently never arose again as such, but was subsumed and carried along in the course of the larger evolving military commitment of the U.S. generally.

THE INITIAL GROUND COMBAT DEPLOYMENT

(TS) Regarding deployment of the 9th MEB for Da Nang security, however, matters were meanwhile progressing apace. Receipt of COMUSMACV's pessimistic assessment of the internal military situation early on 6 March² had had a profound impact on the CJCS. Prompted by the blunt candor of the message, he conferred with the SecDef late that same morning, urging upon him the pressing need for Marines at Da Nang now. The SecDef was convinced. At lunch with the President shortly afterward, he presented a strong case for deploying the MEB. The upshot was that he succeeded in prevailing upon the President to grant the authority to do so.³ The decision, apparently was unrelated to any larger policy considerations such as intervention.

(TS) That afternoon the SecDef telephoned the Vice DJS and directed that the JCS issue the necessary orders at 1900 hours (local Washington time) the same evening to deploy two USMC BLTs to Da Nang. The Secretary instructed that they would be purely for security purposes and were not to be used in day-to-day actions against the Viet Cong. He also cautioned that there be no statement

¹Msg JCS 4213 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV 272333Z Jan 65, TS. Msg, CJCS to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV JCS 6347 041712Z Mar 65, TS, LHMDS; Hq. USMACV Command History 1965, 20 Apr 66, TS.

²Msg, COMUSMACV 1190 to CJCS Info CINCPAC 060500Z Mar 65, TS.

³NMCC EA records, TS.

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to the press other than through official information channels, OSD-PA would make an appropriate public announcement that night, timed to be released just after issuance of the JCS order.¹

(TS) The CJCS, upon being advised of the decision above, immediately called back the SecDef to check if it had also been coordinated with the State Department. The SecDef reassured him it had.²

(TS) After much telephone consulting about the exact wording in which the execution instructions should be cast, the JCS message ordering the deployment was drafted. The CJCS returned to the Pentagon to approve it personally and it then went out as directed at 1901 hours Washington local time (6 March). It ordered CINCPAC (with COMUSMACV also listed as an addressee) to put the two Marine BLTs ashore at Da Nang along with a helicopter squadron and support elements as required, stipulating that "they will not engage in day-to-day actions against the Viet Cong." Included also were instructions not to release information to the press.³ An hour later, at 2000 hours, OSD-PA made the public announcement of the Marine deployment as planned, saying the U.S. move was being taken after consultation with the Vietnam Government which had requested it.⁴

(TS) Some two hours after the JCS message was transmitted, the American Embassy in Saigon belatedly learned from local U.S. military sources of the U.S. action under way. The discovery caught them by surprise. This was their first awareness of the decision, let alone that it was in the process of being implemented. Whereupon an Embassy telegram was immediately dispatched to the SecState -- a simultaneous info copy automatically came into the NMCC -- urgently

¹NMCC EA records, TS.

²NMCC EA records, TS.

³Msg, JCS 6580 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV 070001Z, 6 Mar 65, TS.

⁴NMCC EA records, TS.

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requesting that public announcement be held up because the matter had not yet been taken up and coordinated with the South Vietnam government. But the OSD-PA announcement had already been made more than an hour earlier.¹

(TS) What had happened was a consequence of the informal manner in which some of the command and control functions attending national decision making were carried out at the highest governmental level. Inadvertently, one of the key circuit junctions in the intricately complex system failed in this instance to be closed at the right time. The SecDef, after obtaining Presidential approval for the Marine deployment, had promptly telephoned the Undersecretary of State (Secretary Rusk was out of town) and apprised him of the fact. Then the Undersecretary, through an oversight, neglected to pass it on to the responsible official concerned within his own department who was the only link to get it into proper action channels. As a result, there had been no follow-through on the State side and the Ambassador in Saigon was never contacted.

(TS) Since the public announcement was out and could not well be retracted, this disconcerting development posed unexpected problems of some delicacy in an otherwise smooth and orderly execution of an important national decision. A solution was finally extemporized, but not without considerable telephone consultations back and forth among the DepSecDef, OSD-PA, State, the CJCS, Vice DJS, J-3, MACV Hq., and others. The dilemma was resolved by the expedient of resorting to a measure of deliberate semantic ambiguity. It was decided to allow, on the one hand, only a token advance party of the Marine force ashore on the announced day of landing (7 March), and, on the other, to postpone the actual tactical landing of the main body for a day pending completion of what was now the post facto

¹NMCC EA records, TS.

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protocol gesture of coordinating with the Vietnam Government. A delay was so directed by the JCS in another message,¹ and the Ambassador went through the formality of obtaining country clearance from the host government.

(S) Next day, on 8 March, the first wave of Marines came in across the beaches near Da Nang without incident, followed over the succeeding few days by the remaining elements by air and the sea tail. Total troop strength involved amounted to approximately 3700, bringing the grand total for U.S. military personnel in-country to roughly 27,500. Earlier fears regarding the political sensitivity of such a step proved unfounded and there were no untoward repercussions to this initial introduction of U.S. ground combat forces into South Vietnam.

(S) Presence of the Marines still did not of itself represent a national commitment by the U.S. to a participating role in the ground war. But it proved to be the start of the progressive force buildup that followed and led ultimately to a combat mission as cobelligerents.

THE CSA THREE-DIVISION RECOMMENDATION

(TS) Even before decision on the 9th MEB deployment, a fresh round of new incentives for additional ground force deployments, on a considerably greater scale and for a less restrictive purpose, was gathering momentum. On the morning of 3 March, the day following launching of the first ROLLING THUNDER strikes, the President held a breakfast conference, attended by the SecDef and others, to critique the operation and review Vietnam prospects generally. Briefed on the disintegrating trend of the ground war in the south, he gave instructions for the Chief of Staff, U.S. Army, to go there personally to look things over and report back on what should be done to ameliorate conditions.²

¹Msg, JCS 6581 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV 070327Z Mar 65, TS.

²NMCC EA Records, TS; Interview No. 01, TS.

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(TS) Late the next day the CSA, accompanied by the Assistant SecDef (ISA) and representatives from each of the Services and the Joint Staff, left for Vietnam on an inspection trip in order to survey in depth the internal military situation and assess its implications from a more strategic perspective than localized problems of the moment. His terms of reference did not contemplate any radical reorientation of U.S. policy toward the Vietnam war, but only to see how the effectiveness of the present U.S. support role might be improved. His stay lasted from 5 through 13 March.¹

(TS) Extensive consultation with U.S. and Vietnamese military and civil officials at various levels convinced the CSA of the seriousness of the general situation. Based on the first-hand observations gleaned from the inspection tour and reflecting views and recommendations solicited from COMUSMACV, his staff, and subordinate commanders, the CSA accordingly developed a 21-point program of specific military measures that the U.S. should take to arrest the deterioration and enhance the South Vietnamese war effort. Essentially the body of proposals was a continuation of the kind of support hitherto furnished, albeit greatly expanded and accelerated. The ARVN would still carry the burden of engaging the enemy in combat and doing the actual fighting. The only provisions pertaining to major force deployments were for more helicopters and light aircraft reinforcements.²

(TS) Upon returning to Washington, the CSA reported the findings of his trip, including the proposed 21-point program. Though he had been functioning in the capacity of a special emissary representing the President personally, the report was submitted to the SecDef and the other members of the JCS in the form of a memorandum, "Report on Survey of the Military Situation in Vietnam" dated 14 March.³

¹NMCC EA Records, TS; Interview No. 01, TS.

²Interviews No. 01 and No. 06, TS.

³CSA Memo for SecDef et al, 14 Mar 65, TS.

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All concurred in the 21-point proposals, and the SecDef immediately forwarded the report to the President.¹ The following day the President after reviewing it with the CJCS and the CSA, approved the entire program and CINCPAC was so advised.² Approval was formally confirmed in the NSC meeting of 25 March, at which time the President requested a current status report on each of the 21 actions. Two days later the CJCS responded, informing the President that all were moving smoothly.

(TS) At about this same time the U.S. Ambassador in Saigon was also being asked for views and recommendations on what should be done in the political and economic sphere to aid the Vietnamese war effort. Asked to come to Washington by the President for consultations, he prepared a 41-point program of nonmilitary actions to be taken by the U.S., which he submitted upon his arrival on 30 March.⁴ It too was confined essentially to continuing U.S. policy along present lines, but intensified and on a larger scale, and included some additional measures not heretofore stressed.

(TS) Both the CSA's 21-point military program and the Ambassador's 41-point nonmilitary program were cast in terms of the U.S. supporting the South Vietnamese, not in terms of the U.S. directly involving itself in the operational conduct of the war. They were thus a logical extension and intensification of past posture, rather than a departure from it. Presence of the Marines notwithstanding, the old doctrinaire premise of everything short of U.S. forces actually engaging in combat still prevailed, and in fact accounted for the very constraints circumscribing the limited Marine mission. However, a radical break would come shortly. It was already germinating and would coincide with the two proposed programs as well as several other currents under way.

¹JCSM 197-65 for SecDef 17 Mar 65, TS SENSITIVE; JCS 2343/542 TS SENSITIVE.

²JCS 7484 to CINCPAC, EXCLUSIVE SENSITIVE 150019Z Mar 65, TS.

³CM 522-65 for the President, 26 Mar 65, TS.

⁴JCS 2343/566, TS.

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(TS) The precipitant event was the same CSA's visit to South Vietnam. Independently of his 21-point program developed in response to the original Presidential guidelines, he simultaneously began formulating on his own a totally different proposal far beyond the narrow implications of the literal terms of reference of his trip. His survey could not help but reveal the general military position as becoming rapidly untenable, irrespective of how much U.S. aid and support were provided. Indeed, corroborating appraisals by responsible military authorities on the scene assessed the entire strategy as no longer viable. COMUSMACV and his staff, in their briefings of the CSA, saw the disintegrating situation as desperate and argued for retrenchment and reconstitution of force resources. They outlined an enclave concept as the only alternative open under the circumstances and as a prerequisite to any future courses of action when conditions warranted. Envisioned was the establishment of a series of well-defended strong points, each with seaport and airfield accessibility, located in areas along the coast that offered the best prospects of maintaining U.S. military presence indefinitely and from which the offensive might later be regained. The concept presupposed large numbers of U.S., and possibly Allied, troops to hold and build up these bases.¹

(TS) Whatever the merits of the strategy underlying the enclave concept itself, it was clear to the CSA that the U.S. had to do something soon considerably beyond the present policy of supporting VNAF operations or further strategy would be academic. The inescapable conclusion, as far as the CSA was concerned, was that a large-scale outside ground force would have to be introduced to engage directly in combat. The war was at a crossroads.

(TS) [

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¹Hq USMACV Command History 1965, 20 April 66, TS; Interviews No. 1A and No. 09, 76.

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(U) The CSA's report of 14 March, over and above the recommended 21 measures, had also raised the idea of possible U.S. intervention by deploying ground combat forces. Less than a proposal, it was presented only as an abstract hypothetical consideration to be explored in conjunction with, and contingent upon, a more basic reexamination of whether U.S. policy toward the Vietnam war should not be modified. One alternative contemplated a tailored division force or larger to take over some of the defense mission in key areas and thus free ARVN forces for offensive operations. Another alternative contemplated introducing a U.S., or international SEATO-sponsored, force of about four-division size deployed on a flank south of the DMZ across both the entire width of South Vietnam and the panhandle of Laos to the Mekong, thus sealing off South Vietnam from the north and stopping infiltration overland. Though not stated as explicit recommendations at that time in the report, clearly the CSA had concluded in his own mind that a mix of both alternatives was desirable.²

¹JCS 2339/162-2, 25.

²Memo CSA for SecDef et al, 14 Mar 65, op cit ~~TOP SECRET~~.

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(TS) When the CSA returned to Washington he immediately began advocating, within the military community, the commitment of substantial ground combat forces in Vietnam. Painting a dark picture of the overall military situation, he advised that only outside intervention could now stave off the otherwise inexorable march of Communist victory. He proposed deploying a three-division force, to consist of a U.S. Marine Expeditionary Force, a U.S. Army airmobile division, and a third-country (ROK) Allied division force, plus considerable expansion of helicopter and O-1 units as recommended in his separate 21-point program. An important departure from the original coastal enclave concept was his contemplated employment of the Army force in the interior, in the central highlands area around Pleiku.¹ Later in the month the CSA nominated the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile), formerly designated as the experimental 11th Air Assault Division (Provisional), to be the Army's contingent for this mission.²

THE JCS INTERVENTION PROPOSAL

(TS) These views, with the full weight of the CSA behind them -- and in light of a large part of the Washington decision-making community already predisposed to be receptive -- quickly had an impact. They crystallized the issue and brought it to a head. The proposal was formally presented to the JCS, and at their meeting of 17 March, which the SecDef attended, it was the main item on the agenda. There were some reservations about the advisability of the CSA's desires to put the Army division in the interior central highlands but there was little resistance to the proposed course of action as a whole. Even the CSAF went along, though advocating that it should properly be keyed to additional measures against the source of insurgency in the north.³ After much deliberation of its many ramifications, the CSA's proposal was accepted essentially as tabled. It was adopted as the JCS position and the Chiefs agreed so to recommend formally.⁴ At the SecDef's

¹Interview No. 01A; JCS 2343/543, TS.

²CSAM 163-65, 29 Mar 65, TS.

³CSAFM 78-65 for JCS, 17 Mar 65, TS.

⁴Interview No. 01; JCS 2343/543, TS.

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suggestion to forego further consideration of details for the moment, they instructed the Joint Staff to develop a concept for employment of such a three-division force in a combatant role disposed as follows. The MEF in the Da Nang area, the U.S. Army division force in the Pleiku area, and the ROK division force in the Bien Hoa-Ton Son Nhut-Saigon area.¹ The agreement was to confine the JCS recommendation at this stage to a general statement of the proposal.

(TS) The next day, at another JCS meeting, the draft concept developed by the Joint Staff setting forth the proposal in broadly stated terms was addressed. [

] the Chiefs reached ostensible agreement on the basic principle involved and went along with the central idea of intervention through introduction of ground forces in a combat role. At a third meeting the following day, 19 March, the JCS formalized their decision unanimously and gave final approval to the proposal to be forwarded to the SecDef recommending deployment of a three-division U.S./Allied ground combat force into South Vietnam. From all indications the SecDef was prepared to approve the proposal if the JCS recommended it.²

(TS) Thus, an abrupt about face had occurred. Less than two weeks earlier the JCS had advised the SecDef, in direct response to his query, that no additional major forces were required to be deployed to South Vietnam. This in turn had been consistent with the same position expressly confirmed and reconfirmed by both COMUSMACV and CINCPAC. Now the JCS were convinced that a relatively massive force commitment was necessary or all would be lost. What had happened to bring about this abrupt change?

(TS) There had been no dramatic development to account for the reversal, either operationally in the objective area or with respect

¹JCS 2343/543, TS.

²NMCC EA Records, TS.

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to national policy posture, certainly not in the sense of a sudden intelligence breakthrough. Rather than reaction to a particular event, apparently it was the cumulative result of a belated realization that the existing situation had gradually undergone transformation, and with that conviction, an appreciation of the general tenor and significance of the change was now coming into focus. For some time there had been a growing awareness of reported infiltration by DRV military personnel into South Vietnam. By early March there was not only reasonably firm evidence corroborating the presence of DRV regulars augmenting the VC but strong indications pointing to the rate of infiltration being considerably greater than formerly suspected. DRV troops in organized battalion-size units, operating in conjunction with or independently of the VC, were being identified. Moreover, the pattern of enemy operations, in scale, aggressiveness, and systematic execution, seemed to be taking on a more conventional tactical character than guerrilla activity. Recent enemy successes in gaining control of most of Route 19, running on an east-west axis from Qui Nhon on the coast to Pleiku in the interior, effectively denied a strategically vital artery and threatened to cut the country in half. It all meant that an unexpected new force upsetting the OB balance had to be contended with and suggested that the insurgency was escalating into a new phase.

(TS) Concern indeed was sudden, though not the circumstances that gave rise to it. In fact, the very recognition of past error lent an added note of urgency. Owing to a dearth of reliable indicators, and the fact that rigorous intelligence criteria were being followed, formal estimates of enemy capability had clearly been, in the first instance, too conservative, and, secondly, lagged far behind current realities. It should be noted that this reassessment evolved informally at the field level over a period of time. Yet once emerged, it was conveyed immediately and directly via informal channels, largely through the efforts of the CSA personally, to the decision-making authorities in Washington, then was acted upon rapidly.

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Strangely, despite its far-reaching implications, the new appraisal was neither generated by nor precipitated a formal national-level intelligence inquiry into the state of the internal military situation in South Vietnam. The intelligence community as such seems to have had no role in making or validating the estimate. Official NIEs or SNIEs for the period do not address the subject.

(U) It was in this institutionally unstructured context and by such ad hoc processes that one of the basic issues of the war arose, was dealt with, and a decision reached.

(TS) On 20 March, in a long memorandum to the SecDef, the JCS recommended that, in view of "the present grave situation" in South Vietnam, U.S. and Allied forces be committed there for combat missions. They stated that because the marked deterioration in the military situation had become critical, the U.S. must fill the breach. Accordingly, "...direct U.S. military action appears to be imperative if defeat is to be avoided." They therefore recommended deployment of the following forces to cope with the existing internal situation: An MEF with a strength of approximately 39,000; a U.S. Army division force of approximately 26,000; an ROK division force of approximately 21,000, and four TFSs, plus appropriate support forces. The total for tactical ground elements alone numbered 86,000 troops, and provided for a combat equivalent greater than four average divisions, rather than three. Further specific details on force requirements were not offered, but a general concept of employment of these forces was outlined, roughly corresponding to the three-point force disposition agreed to at the JCS meeting three days earlier. In addition, reflecting in part the Air Force views, they advised the SecDef that other forces were also needed to increase air action against North Vietnam and to deter the DRV and ChiComs, although the size of the latter requirement was left unspecified.¹ In all, this amounted to a grand total force requirement somewhere on the order of 150,000.

¹JCSM 204-65 to SecDef, 20 Mar 65, TS.

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(TS) The CJCS followed up formal transmittal of the memorandum containing the JCS proposal by conferring with the SecDef personally the same day. Meantime CINCPAC was summoned to Washington, and in the JCS meeting on 22 March with the SecDef he supported the general proposal. The SecDef agreed to take it under advisement with a view to presenting it for national decision.¹

DETERRENCE/CONTINGENCY REQUIREMENTS RECONSIDERED -

(TS) Aside from the requirements of the existing internal military situation in South Vietnam, the deterrence/contingency force requirement relating to the outside threat also promised to be considerable. This subordinate parallel question had once again been reopened, by the CJCS personally, as a separate problem independent of the three-division proposal, during another cycle of concern over the possibility of overt ChiCom/DRV intervention. The Chairman considered existing contingency plans for such an eventuality as inadequate. It was his contention that [] might not be logistically feasible owing to the time-phasing involved, while [] might not, for political reasons, be implemented early enough to prevent the ChiComs from jeopardizing the security of or eliminating the U.S. foothold on the continent.² Although the CSAF registered a demurrer challenging the evaluation and objecting to the far-reaching ramifications of the concept implied,³ the JCS on 13 March requested CINCPAC to prepare a time-phased course of action for introduction of: (1) the minimum ground forces required to be deployed to RVN to oppose successfully a DRV/ChiCom attack into northern South Vietnam; (2) minimum ground forces required to be deployed to Thailand and/or Laos to defend successfully against the ChiComs in the event of attack through Laos and Burma; (3) minimum air and naval forces required in the WESTPAC/

¹ NMCC EA Records, TS.

² CM 481-65 for DJS, 10 Mar 65, TS.

³ CSAFM 67-65 for JCS, 12 Mar 65, TS.

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SEA area in connection with the above; and (4) logistic requirements to support the above.¹ Near the end of the month CINCPAC, after obtaining the views of COMUSMACV, submitted his reply.

(TS) CINCPAC's response, dated 28 March, projected specific force requirements based on what was provided for in current contingency plans [] but with considerable revision upward. Moreover, the mix and phasing were quite different. Most important, deployments to preposition a large part of these forces were desired now. The DRV/ChiCom threat to South Vietnam, Thailand, and Laos was seen as tactically interrelated. It was emphasized, therefore, that the problem had to be addressed SEA-wide and the force requirements must be taken together. Nevertheless, to comply with the JCS terms of reference, yet reflecting this broader area approach, the breakdown was spelled out as follows:

a. Minimum ground forces required for South Vietnam to oppose successfully a ChiCom/DRV attack into northern South Vietnam.

(1) Needed now and should be deployed to South Vietnam immediately -- []

(2) Required to be deployed on warning of attack []

(3) Required to be deployed after attack commences -- []

[] ground forces, including additional logistic support forces prescribed in []

¹Msg, JCS 7030 to CINCPAC 131847Z Mar 65, TS.

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b. Minimum ground forces required for Thailand:

(1) Required to be deployed as soon as feasible --

(2) Required to be deployed in event of warning or after attack commences --

c. Air Force forces required to be deployed now:

(1) To South Vietnam --

(2) To Thailand/Laos --

(3) To WESTPAC (various locations) --

d. Air Force forces required to be deployed to Thailand in event of warning or after attack commences --

e. Naval forces required to be deployed in event of warning or after attack commences:

[]
(Also listed in the above category under naval forces required were

[]
(28) Considerable emphasis was given to the supporting logistic and construction requirements associated with these force deployments in both South Vietnam and Thailand, as well as in other areas of WESTPAC. Singled out in particular was a requirement for support troops to prepare for the additional forces. Finally,

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CINCPAC recommended that actions needed to satisfy all these requirements be initiated at the earliest possible time.¹

(TS) This was a far cry from the token deterrence/contingency requirement consistently expressed up to now. The magnitude fell roughly in the same range as the three-division force proposal submitted by the JCS a few days earlier to cope with the deteriorating internal situation. Although there was obviously much overlap, since many of the forces would serve in a dual capacity for both missions, the two sets of requirements had not been coordinated but were developed independently of each other. The total forces required would therefore be greater than either individually but by no means the sum of the two.

(S) Thus, as the month of March was coming to a close, pressures from two different directions were building up for the deployment of major U.S. combat forces. One stemmed from the real and present internal threat posed by the disintegrating military situation within South Vietnam, the other from the external threat of possible outside intervention by DRV/ChiCom forces. Before a national decision on the basic issue of large-scale force commitment could be made, a new element of urgency was injected by specific and immediate local security needs.

INTENSIFIED LOCAL SECURITY REQUIREMENTS

(TS) On 29 March, the day following submission of the contingency force requirement, CINCPAC, acting on COMUSMACV's urgent request for increased forces for local security at additional sites where U.S. installations were in jeopardy, recommended deployment now of two more USMC BLTs, plus a USMC F-4 squadron and support troops.² The JCS concurred and informally passed the requirement to the DepSecDef as a special recommendation apart from the larger question of proposed

¹Msg, CINCPAC to JCS 280050Z Mar 65, TS.

²Msg, CINCPAC to JCS 292233Z March 65, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

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major force commitment. The effect was to reinforce and speed up the main currents generally, although it did not lose its identity in the process. The ad hoc requirement was shortly to be tabled and addressed by the NSC along with other broader issues.

(C) Then, as if to underscore the crisis juncture confronting the U.S., the VC on 30 March perpetrated a brazen terrorist bombing attack on the U.S. Embassy in Saigon, killing two Americans and injuring 45 others, plus 18 South Vietnamese killed and over 100 wounded. It prompted a forceful statement of outrage by the President and a declaration of U.S. determination to strengthen further South Vietnam's resistance against Communist aggression.

(TS) From the first, when the three-division proposal was initially broached at the JCS meeting of 17 March, the SecDef's reaction had been favorable, at least in principle. He could be expected to support the JCS position vigorously when the time came to present their recommendation for a decision at the highest national level. Over the next two weeks he and other key OSD officials explored it in lengthy conferences among themselves, with the State Department, the White House staff, and the President himself. But consensus, pro or con, was not easily achieved. There was almost universal reluctance to embark on a course of action fraught with such policy implications, however cogent the substantive military need. The political climate was not conducive to any major escalatory move in an unpopular war. Domestically, public opinion would not be receptive; the press, the academic community, and some influential Congressional leaders were already openly critical. Abroad, Allies and neutrals would be less than sympathetic; many were withholding diplomatic support or actively opposing present U.S. policy. Whatever the final outcome of the deliberative discussions going on in the Administration, considerations of political feasibility exercised a powerful conditioning restraint on decision.

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(TS) Nevertheless, as the informal dialogues progressed, a tacit inclination toward general acceptance of the central proposition, i.e., direct U.S. involvement in ground combat, began to be evident. By 29 March the SecDef was firmly convinced that there was no other choice and U.S. troops would ultimately have to be deployed. On that day, in the JCS meeting which he attended, he accordingly directed that the Joint Staff begin preparing a detailed plan and time schedule for actions necessary to introduce a "two- to three-division force" into South Vietnam at the earliest practicable date.¹

(TS) From all indications, the President and his advisors too were coming around to the same conclusion. By the end of the month, as subsequent events would prove to bear out, the essence of such a decision had in effect crystallized. Before final decision action, the U.S. Ambassador in Saigon was invited back to Washington for consultations, arriving on 30 March. His views, as expressed to the JC and elsewhere, though marked by serious reservations and some opposition to the principle of intervention, apparently gave no cause for stopping or changing the nature and course of the decision that was in train.

THE APRIL PRESIDENTIAL DECISIONS

(TS) On 1 April, in a full-dress NSC meeting, the several proposals and recommendations pertaining to Vietnam that were pending were formally addressed. Most were disposed of straightforwardly during the session in the form of an official decision being expressly rendered on each in turn. By Presidential decision the CSA's 21-point program of military actions submitted on 14 March was approved (again), with emphasis on accelerating delivery of the helicopter and light observation aircraft. Ambassador Taylor's 41-point program of nonmilitary actions was similarly approved. The President also approved immediate deployment of the requested two additional Marine

¹JCS 2343/543-1 through 8, TS; SecDef Memo for CJCS, Further Actions in South Vietnam, 5 Apr 65, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

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battalions and one Marine air squadron, plus associated headquarters and support elements. At the same time, a change of mission was approved for all Marine forces in-country to permit more active use of them as determined by the SecDef in consultation with the SecState.

(TS) Decision on the issue of the proposed introduction of a three-division force was not explicitly stated as such. However, the President did approve an "18-20,000 man increase in U.S. military support forces to fill out existing units and supply needed logistic personnel." Moreover, he also approved urgent efforts to arrange rapid deployment of significant Korean, Australian, and New Zealand combat elements into South Vietnam.

(TS) Implied in the above two decisions was that the President had made a qualified and perhaps still tentative decision for committing major ground forces, ostensibly on the order of the CSA's three-division proposal, but was reserving the formal articulation of that decision until specific details were better defined and, possibly, when the timing would be more propitious. Indeed a sense of such a decision being forthcoming seems to have been conveyed to, or was anticipated by, key officials even before the NSC meeting.

(TS) All of the above decisions were formally promulgated in NSAM 328, dated 6 April. This was the only NSAM produced pertaining to ground force deployments. There were no further NSAMs issued thereafter containing references to the subject, although a long series of important national decisions on deployment issues followed over the period of the next two years. Evidently the President elected to dispense with the formalities of NSC proceedings and chose instead to deal selectively with individuals on an ad hoc basis to arrive at his decisions.

(TS) Although the essence of a national decision endorsing limited intervention in the ground war seems to have emerged on or about 1 April 1965, it was at best abstract and incomplete. Furthermore,

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subsequent events devolving from it would reveal that the decision was also somewhat arcane, for a clear-cut resolution of the policy issue was apparently not expressed as such to anyone in so many words then or later. At this point the decision was presumably firm only with respect to direction; otherwise it was still open-ended, its terms left unspecified. Except for a tantalizing partial concreteness represented by those particulars explicitly defined in the NSC action, it was fundamentally lacking in form with neither the magnitude nor the timing and pace of force buildup yet determined. This amorphous state made for ambiguity that was not clarified for the next several weeks. In the interim, conflicting interpretations of what the intended purport of the basic decision actually was resulted in much misunderstanding. Confusion was finally dissipated by the gradual evolutionary process of cumulative increments becoming fixed de facto, after enough piecemeal deployments made such a national commitment self-evidently a fait accompli.

(TS) The CJCS, as indeed most of the military community, was under the impression that the decision definitely was to put U.S./ Allied ground forces into South Vietnam along the lines of the CSA-initiated three-division proposal recommended by the JCS. On the afternoon of 1 April, following the NSC session, he informally so advised CINCPAC. The latter then informed the Chairman that Australia and New Zealand were more than willing to join the U.S. In fact, in the course of preliminary military talks then under way, he had learned that the Australians, in anticipation, had already placed a battalion on alert ready to move, while New Zealand was also prepared to contribute. Their enthusiasm had to be dampened by the PACOM representatives because things were going too fast. In any event, both countries could be counted on to cooperate. The total strength of the combined ANZAC commitment would amount to between 1000 and 1100 troops, composed of one Australian infantry battalion

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(plus logistic support) and one New Zealand artillery battery (plus signal elements).¹

(TS) Formal references to the 1 April decision in official JCS documents even more literally reflect the understanding that a large-scale ground force commitment would be made. The purpose of the 18-20,000 increase in logistic forces that had been expressly approved, for example, was cited as preparatory to and in support of additional U.S. combat troops and expanded operational activity in South Vietnam.² Whether presumption or inference, this was the conclusion about the main thrust of the decision confidently held by the ranking military authorities concerned. In fact on 2 April the JCS formally recommended to the SecDef a series of adjustments in governmental policies and procedures for more effective prosecution of the Vietnam war. The proposals had been initiated by the CJCS as early as 16 March in anticipation of burgeoning Southeast Asia demands and now the JCS were advocating in their list of recommended actions what amounted to going on a semiwar footing. Included were measures to relax fiscal constraints, raise military and civilian manpower ceilings, extend terms of service, and permit call-up of reservists. As it turned out, most of the proposed steps were neither approved nor disapproved. The SecDef did not respond until 14 May, and then indicated that much of what had been recommended was legally not feasible under present circumstances but could only be implemented in the event execution of a major CINCPAC operational plan were ordered.³

(TS) Furthermore, a succession of individual unit deployments in the first few days of early April, though authorized on a case-by-case basis, tended to reinforce the impression that a large-scale

¹NMCC EA Records, TS.

²JCS 2343/566, TS.

³CM 488-65 for DJS 16 Mar 65, TS; JCSM 238-65 for SecDef 2 Apr 65, TS; Memo SecDef for CJCS 14 May 65, TS; JCS 2343/540, JCS 2343/540-1, TS.

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build-up was actually getting under way. On the recommendation of the CSAF, concurred in by the JCS, an F-4C squadron was approved on 2 April for urgent deployment to Thailand because of recent signs of enemy air capability posing a threat to U.S. forces and installations in South Vietnam and Thailand. Arriving on 7 April, the F-4C squadron was quickly followed by an F-105 squadron that arrived in Thailand on 11 April. An RB-66 Recce Task Force was also approved for Vietnam, and three other TFSs and three TCSs (C-130) were ordered to WESTPAC bases.¹]

(S) However, as later developments would soon prove, the interpretation put on the decision by State Department officials, particularly by the U.S. Embassy in Saigon, did not coincide with the views entertained by the military. The differences came to a head toward the latter part of the month.

CROSSING THE THRESHOLD

(TS) Over the succeeding few days following the NSC meeting of 1 April, consistent with the military interpretation of the national

¹CSAFM J-79-65 for JCS 19 Mar 65; TS; JCSM 202-65 for SecDef 20 Mar 65, TS; JCS 2353/75 TS; JCS 7934 to CINCSRIKE et al 262352Z Mar 65 TS; JCS 8307 to CINCSRIKE et al 021901Z Apr 65 TS; JCS 8467 to CINCSRIKE et al 032031Z Apr 65; JCS 2343/559-1, TS.

²JCS 8622 to CINCPAC et al 042034Z Apr 65 TS; Embtel Bangkok to State 1588, 19 Apr 65, S; JCS 9531 to CINCPAC et al 212045Z Apr 65, TS; Memo SecDef to CJCS, Manpower Increases in RVN, 6 Apr 65, S.

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decision, attention began to be given to specific logistic units needed to prepare for the buildup of combat forces. COMUSMACV recommended deployment as soon as possible of an Engineer Construction Group and a Signal Combat Support Battalion, as well as the Army Logistic Command previously asked for back as early as November 1964. However, when CINCPAC conferred by telephone with the Ambassador in Saigon on 4 April regarding country clearances for these units, the Ambassador registered strong disapproval. He was not only very much against the deployments in question, but also the reasons behind them. He submitted that the President's 18-20,000 figure was meant for general augmentation of present support programs, not to prepare the way for a major introduction of combat troops. He claimed that neither such preparatory logistic deployments nor the combat forces themselves were needed, certainly not yet. CINCPAC equally insisted otherwise. The diametrically opposed views were left unreconciled for the time being.¹

(TS) Meanwhile, one of the first implementing actions taken as a result of the 1 April decisions was with respect to USMC forces. Two days after the NSC meeting the JCS, on instructions of the SecDef, issued orders to increase in-country Marine strength and change their mission. On 3 April, after the J-3 Pacific Division action officer had coordinated with the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs at the White House and the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, CINCPAC was directed to deploy to South Vietnam the earlier requested two additional BLTs and an F-4 squadron, plus necessary MEB, RLT, and MAG headquarters personnel and associated support troops as required. At the same time the JCS also authorized CINCPAC to "expand the mission of Marine elements to include engagement in counterinsurgency combat operations."² Despite instructions this time to execute the movement when arrangements were made with the Vietnam government, there was again briefly some misunderstanding until country clearances were obtained by the U.S. Embassy in

¹NMCC EA Records, TS; Interviews No. 01 and No. 08, TS.

²Msg, JCS 8387 to CINCPAC info COMUSMACV 032048Z Apr 65, TS.

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Saigon.¹ The additional Marine troops arrived in the Da Nang area between 10-19 April with 1 BLT going to Phu Bai, and the F-4 squadron came between 4-12 April.²

(TS) Before these Marine deployments were completed, ad hoc requirements for yet more ground combat forces for local security purposes at other sites were coming in. Besides further Marine units, Army combat troops were now requested. As early as 21 March COMUSMACV had expressed the desirability of having, in addition to a full Army division, a separate highly mobile Army brigade at his disposal to provide a quick-reaction emergency capability.³ The obvious choice, and the one mentioned in connection with other earlier deployment proposals, was the 173rd Airborne Brigade stationed in Okinawa. However, the 173rd was the only parachute assault force in PACOM, and as such constituted an important part of the forward positioned contingency readiness posture maintained for the entire WESTPAC area. Any contemplated deployment to South Vietnam therefore was to be temporary, pending replacement by a new similar brigade directly from CONUS, so the 173rd could return at the earliest possible time to Okinawa and revert to PACOM reserve status.⁴

(TS) By the end of March the requirement for the 173rd Airborne Brigade took on a more specific and immediate purpose. The need for combat ground forces to secure the airfield at Bien Hoa in the Saigon vicinity and the port area at Vung Tau nearby had become acute. Both facilities, considered essential to present U.S. operations and future plans, were vulnerable to VC attack. COMUSMACV and CINCPAC agreed it was necessary to deploy the 173rd there to fill the breach as soon as possible, largely on the basis of it being the most readily available, and CINCPAC so recommended to the JCS during his visit in early April.⁵

¹NMCC EA Record, TS.

²Hq. USMACV Command History 1915, 20 Apr 66, TS.

³Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC info JCS 210200Z Mar 65, TS.

⁴CINCPAC Command History 1965, Vol II, 2 May 66, TS; Interview No. 1, TS.

⁵Ibid, TS; Msg COMUSMACV MAC 1724 to CINCPAC info JCS, 301340Z Mar 65 TS; NMCC EA Records, TS.

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The requirement, by now overtaken by larger considerations, was incorporated and acted upon in the context of a proposed comprehensive buildup program that would emerge from a deployment planning conference shortly to be held at CINCPAC headquarters.

THE APRIL HONOLULU DEPLOYMENT PLANNING CONFERENCE

(TS) The holding of a CINCPAC deployment planning conference was a direct offshoot of the 1 April NSC decisions and reflected the military understanding of what had been decided. This version, as noted, was at odds with some other interpretations. The convening of the conference was triggered by CINCPAC's request for deploying the Presidentially approved logistic support forces. On 5 April CINCPAC, acting on COMUSMACV's recommendation, provided the JCS with a detailed breakdown of the desired phasing of these logistic troops totaling 20,267, all of whom were to be brought in relatively soon beginning immediately, in order to prepare for the reception and support of combat forces.¹ The same day the SecDef, in a meeting with the JCS, authorized the logistic deployment. However, in discussing the above requirement he injected some new factors to be considered. His concern was that the continued serious deterioration of the military situation in I and II Corps areas of South Vietnam, if not reversed, could collapse sooner than expected. Therefore, it might be necessary to bring in other combat forces before the desired logistic base for their operations was ready. Deployment of combat troops simultaneously with logistic forces was a distinct possibility, and plans for such an eventuality were urgently needed. Following the meeting, he issued a directive confirming his earlier instructions of 29 March that a detailed plan and time schedule be developed for introducing a two- to three-division force into South Vietnam at the earliest practicable time.

(TS) Next day CINCPAC was accordingly advised by the Director, Joint Staff, of the requirement for the plans and requested to convene

¹Msg, CINCPAC to JCS 052325Z Apr 15, TS.

²SecDef Memo for CJCS, 5 Apr 65, TS.

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a deployment planning conference at his headquarters on or before 9 April to develop them.¹ Preliminary guidance along the lines of the SecDef's views was provided, to the effect that combat troops would probably have to be phased in at the same time as the logistic forces. A few hours later, formal JCS terms of reference for the conference were conveyed to CINCPAC. They stated that approval had been obtained for deployment of approximately 20,000 logistic support forces, which included the 4500 previously recommended by COMUSMACV, namely the 2100-man Army Logistic Command and the 2400-man Engineer Construction Group. These 20,000 were identified as being in preparation for combat forces and to support current operations. Accordingly, it was directed that the conference develop plans to provide for deploying a three-division force concurrently with the 20,000-man logistic forces, as follows: the III MEF having a strength of 39,000, a U.S. Army division force of 26,000, and a ROK division force of 21,000. With the separate 20,000 logistic element, this amounted to a grand total of 106,000 additional ground troops to be deployed to South Vietnam.²

(TS) Before the conference got under way, on 8 April the SecDef responded to the original JCS proposal of 27 Mar (JCSM 204-65) that he recommended the three-division force for Vietnam. He advised the CJCS that the recommendations contained therein had in effect been overtaken by decisions reached at the highest national level in connection with Ambassador Taylor's visit.³ The SecDef memo was "noted" and further staffing on the JCS paper pertaining to the matter was directed to be dropped.⁴ Yet, the same day a full recapitulation of the JCS-approved terms of reference for the upcoming Honolulu conference was promulgated in detail for the guidance of CINCPAC. They were oriented to, and reiterated, the three-division concept.⁵

¹Msg, JCS 8507, DJS Personal for CINCPAC, 061853Z Apr 65, TS.

²Msg, JCS 8528 to CINCPAC 062211Z Apr 65, TS.

³SecDef Memo for CJCS, 8 Apr 65, TS.

⁴1st N/H JCS 2343/543, TS.

⁵SM-333-65 to CINCPAC, 8 Apr 65, TS.

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(TS) Also on the eve of the conference (8 April) the JCS met with the President, at his request, with all of the Chiefs present, as well as OSD, State, White House and other principals. During a general review of the current status and future prospects of the Vietnam situation, the President was apprised in broad terms of the conference just getting under way at CINCPAC headquarters to address comprehensively the military problems and requirements involved, and that the resulting recommendations would duly be presented for consideration.¹ Apparently, however, the basic policy issue of whether the U.S. should or should not undertake the course of action of intervening in a major way in the ground war was not raised, let alone any reference to specific aspects of strategy bearing upon when and how many forces ought to be deployed. No new directives or guidance either changing or elaborating on the assumptions then governing within the military establishment seem to have emanated from this high-level meeting. Certainly it did not materially affect the purpose or course of the CINCPAC Deployment Planning Conference, nor the nature of the plan it produced.

(TS) The main conference began in Honolulu on 8 April and ended on the 10th, with some technical portions continuing a few days beyond. Attending as principal participants were representatives of CINCPAC, PACOM components, the Services, USMACV, and the Joint Staff (including the J-3), all backed up by a large contingent of staff assistants. Out of their concentrated efforts came a proposed deployment program, developed in relative detail as a well-rounded package, which was organized and cast in accordance with the standard format of a military plan. The product, identified as "CINCPAC Deployment Plan for Logistics and Combat Forces to Southeast Asia," dated 10 April 1965, was forwarded to JCS by CINCPAC letter of transmittal of the same date.²

¹ NMCC EA Records, TS; Interview No. 08, TS; Fact Sheet on U.S. Force Commitments to Vietnam, 8 Apr 65, prepared by J-3 PAC Div. for Mr. Califano, OSD, TS.

² CINCPAC Ltr Ser 000131, 10 Apr 65, TS; JCS 2343/564-1, TS.

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(TS) The body of the plan, after setting forth comparative characterizations of the enemy and friendly situations, concluded that there was an undesirable imbalance in respective capabilities which was progressively growing worse. To reverse the trend and restore a favorable balance, a substantial increase in U.S. support and participation, including deployment of forces, was necessary. Two motifs still dominated -- deterrence/contingency preparations and local security. The objective of deployment was stated as being twofold: (1) to improve deterrent posture and provide a capability to deal with the threat of DRV/ChiCom intervention; and (2) to redress the adverse order-of-battle situation prevailing in South Vietnam. The indicated force requirements accordingly were for deployments of combatant U.S. and Allied ground forces in critically vulnerable areas of South Vietnam, plus a small ground force in Thailand, and for additional air units in both South Vietnam and Thailand, as well as general air augmentation along a north-south array in WESTPAC to counter the growing ChiCom air strength. These would overcome existing deficiencies and provide for a measure of force advantage.

(TS) Outlined was a concept designed to arrest the deteriorating tactical situation in South Vietnam, contain the VC, and eventually regain the initiative. It was a further elaboration on the coastal enclave concept originally presented to the CSA during his visit in March. Forces to be introduced would first be assigned base security missions, and when the bases were secure, would be phased into an active counterinsurgency role in coordination with the RVN armed forces. Deployments would be correspondingly phased to provide for orderly progressive expansion of operations, as follows:

Phase I - increase the local security of existing U.S. installations and establish logistically supportable coastal enclaves from which to support present U.S. air activities and on-going ARVN operations.

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Phase II - centering upon these coastal enclaves, conduct expanding operations from them.

Phase III - secure inland bases and areas.

Phase IV - occupy and improve these inland bases and conduct operations from them to extend areas of control.

(TS) Ground forces to carry out the concept (besides ARVN) would be basically a three-division U.S./Allied force composed of U.S. Army, USMC, and ROK troops and a small contingent from Australia and New Zealand (later possibly from the Philippines as well). Initial deployments of these forces into South Vietnam would involve landings at each coastal enclave, disposed as follows:

Da Nang - in addition to presently deployed MEB, the remainder of the III MEF, plus the ANZAC battalion.

Chu Lai - elements of the ROK division force.

Quang Ngai - remaining elements of the ROK division force.

Qui Nhon - U.S. Army Airmobile Division (minus a brigade force), with supporting troops.

Nha Trang - remaining brigade force of the Airmobile Division, plus logistic support elements.

Bien Hoa - 173rd Army Airborne Brigade (to be relieved as soon as possible by a CONUS brigade and returned to Okinawa to reconstitute PACOM reserve).

A cadre U.S. Army Corps headquarters with minimal Corps troops would also be deployed. The main body of logistic forces would follow the combat forces into the coastal enclaves when secure.

(TS) Initial air deployments to South Vietnam would be:

a. One hundred USMC jet aircraft to Da Nang, to be added to the 36 USAF F-100s already there.

b. One hundred USMC helicopter and light fixed-wing aircraft also to the Da Nang area.

c. Miscellaneous other USAF, USMC, and U.S. Army aircraft to Da Nang and other locations.

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and a U.S. Army Engineer Construction Battalion, plus other essential logistic support troops. In addition to the recent USAF units being deployed to Thailand (an F-4C squadron on 7 April and an F-105 squadron scheduled for 11 April), one Troop Carrier Squadron (C-130) was also to be deployed, plus associated support detachments.

(TS) Deployments to WESTPAC that were called for would consist of the following:

- a. Five USAF Tactical Fighter Squadrons to various designated bases.
- b. Five additional Tactical Fighter Squadrons (locations unspecified).
- c. Four Troop Carrier Squadrons for airlift augmentation.
- d. Three RTFs (mix of RF-101s, RB-66s and RB-57s).
- e. One MEF from EASTPAC to Hawaii-WESTPAC to reconstitute PACOM reserve amphibious capability.

(TS) Considerable attention was given to spelling out command arrangements for all these forces, both those in-country in South Vietnam and Thailand and those based in or operating from adjacent WESTPAC areas.¹

(TS) In sum, the CINCPAC deployment plan contemplated intervention on a substantially massive scale at once. The bulk of the units were expected to be in position at assigned operational destinations in less than three months time. Provided for was a balanced force totaling some 34 maneuver battalion equivalents of combat troops, accompanied by appropriate tactical air elements and supported by an adequate logistic infrastructure. Of these 34 battalions, 24 would

¹Ibid, 25.

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be U.S. [] and 10 would be third country (9 ROK and 1 ANZAC). The underlying rationale was that all forces would be introduced more or less as a package as rapidly as feasible in order to shift the advantage abruptly and decisively away from the enemy in favor of the Allied side. In magnitude this amounted roughly to the same basic three-division proposal originally recommended by the CSA, which had in turn been forwarded by the JCS on 20 March to the SecDef. In fact it had been expanded in the interim by virtue of having been fleshed out more fully, and particularly by the addition of the 173rd Airborne Brigade. The concept too was essentially the one postulated by the USMACV staff in briefing the CSA when he was on his inspection tour early in March, although admittedly having undergone some modification.

(TS) Before the CINCPAC-submitted plan could be processed by the Joint Staff, the SecDef met with the JCS on 13 April. In the context of discussing the general Vietnam situation, and without going into the details of the plan itself, certain policy aspects of intervention were touched upon. The specific issue under consideration, which had motivated convening the SecDef-JCS meeting, was the ad hoc requirement for deploying the 173rd Airborne Brigade immediately for local security. It had been expressly requested by COMUSMACV as a matter of urgency and concurred in by CINCPAC late the day before.¹ One of the broad themes raised in this connection, in comments by the SecDef and others, was the larger strategic implication of introducing ground combat troops in South Vietnam.

(TS) It was agreed that the size and pace of any force deployment was extremely delicate and had to be handled cautiously. Note was taken of the concern repeatedly expressed by the Ambassador in Saigon over the rapidity of the proposed movement of forces into South Vietnam and his position that, furthermore, the basic national decision to intervene had itself not yet been made. The tenor and sense of such

¹Msg, CINCPAC to JCS 132235Z Apr 65, TS.

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reservations suggested that, consistent with the strategic approach to the war as represented in the restrained way the campaign of air action against the DRV was being conducted, a precipitous commitment of ground forces in the South would also be regarded as inadvisable escalation. For these reasons, as well as in recognition of pragmatic constraints on capability to field large forces on short notice or to receive and support them in the objective area, the impression left with the JCS as a result of the meeting was that the Administration's attitude toward intervention was less than sanguine. Whatever forces were eventually to be deployed would probably be in a controlled gradual buildup.¹

(TS) Thus, other than bringing up the contextual considerations, nothing definite was settled at the time as far as laying down criteria or providing a policy frame of reference to guide deployment planning. However, the particular question of the requirement for the 173rd Airborne Brigade, which was the main subject on the agenda, was addressed and decided before the meeting terminated. The SecDef, convinced of the pressing local security need, approved deployment of the 173rd for this mission as soon as arrangements could be made. CINCPAC and COMUSMACV were so informed and directed to begin planning preparations accordingly.²

(TS) Meanwhile a parallel requirement for additional Marines was also developing. On 17 March, COMUSMACV had requested two more BLTs and supporting elements, in all numbering some 5000 personnel, for local security for the Chu Lai area south of Da Nang. In view of the precarious tactical situation, this important keystone of the coastal enclave concept was in jeopardy if left undefended. CINCPAC concurred and so recommended to the JCS, again as an ad hoc requirement largely on its own merits because of compelling needs of the moment.³ The JCS in turn recommended approval to the SecDef on 25 March.⁴

¹JCS 2342/564-1, 3, 4, and 5, TS; NMCC EA Records, TS; Interviews No. 01, 04, and 09, TS.

²JCS 2343/564-3, TS; JCS 9012 to CINCPAC et al 140051Z Apr 65, TS.

³Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC MAC J-3 8250 170747Z Mar 65, TS; USMACV Command History, 1965, op.cit., TS; NMCC EA Records, TS.

⁴JCSM 216-65 for SecDef 25 Mar 65, TS; JCS 2343/546, TS.

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(TS) When the U.S. Ambassador learned of the decision to deploy the 173rd Airborne Brigade, and that the prospect of additional Marines was imminent, he immediately registered a reclama formally protesting the move to the Secretary of State. In a series of messages he strongly opposed bringing in any more forces at this time, on the grounds that there was no real military requirement yet and that it would be politically and strategically counterproductive under the circumstances. Not only did he want the deployment decision reversed but he challenged the wisdom of the entire enclave concept.¹ In short order the Ambassador's opposition was brought to the attention of the White House. In the late evening of 14 April the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs called for the convening of a special State-Defense-White House meeting at 1130 the next morning, 15 April, to resolve the controversy. The JCS were instructed to prepare in writing their views answering point-by-point each of the Ambassador's objections.²

(TS) Following informal consultations among the CJCS, CINCPAC, DJS, and others, the JCS in turn held a special meeting of their own early in the morning before the White House session, in order to coordinate and approve the requested statement of the JCS position. The SecDef made the presentation at the White House meeting, where he managed to channel the spectrum of potential issues so as to confine the discussion to the particular questions at hand -- specifically the 173rd Airborne and the Chu Lai Marines. The SecDef's advocacy succeeded in prevailing upon the SecState and others present to agree in favor of the JCS position and overrule Ambassador Taylor's opposition. Later, Presidential approval authorizing the deployments was obtained. The upshot, after considerable staff coordination between OSD and the Department of State, was a formal State-Defense message that very night (15 April) apprising the Ambassador of what was now expressly an official national decision on the subject. It advised

¹ Embtel Saigon to SecState 3384 EXDIS 14 Apr 65, TS; NMCC EA Records, TS.

² NMCC EA Records, TS.

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him that, because of the deteriorating military situation within South Vietnam, greater U.S. involvement was required and deployment of more combat forces, over and above the 5000 additional Marines and the 173rd Airborne, was being actively considered.¹ This put the matter to rest for the time being. Two days later the JCS informed CINCPAC that deployment of the additional Marines previously requested had been approved. They were to be employed in counterinsurgency operations, with landings expected in May.²

THE JCS STRETCHED-OUT THREE-DIVISION PROPOSAL

(TS) By the middle of April it had become clear to the JCS that the national climate was not conducive to forthright concrete actions leading to entry in the ground war. A prerequisite consensus was still lacking. There were divisions, reservations, vacillation, and plain indecision. More than a hesitation born of reluctance alone, there was at the root of it a positive desire to avoid, or at least postpone, making such a commitment in the expectation that it would somehow yet prove unnecessary. At this point U.S. leadership was counting chiefly on the air-strike campaign against the DRV to exert sufficient leverage on the enemy to bring the war in the south to an end. A priori, thus, any prospective deployment of ground forces was being hopefully viewed then and for some time longer, as, at most, ancillary and subordinate to the main thrust of U.S. strategy directed to the north. Accordingly, the JCS response to the proposed CINCPAC deployment plan reflected a measure of restraint. Nevertheless, as it turned out, it fell far short of the actual conservatism with which the entire ambitious proposal was to be received by political authorities in Washington.

(TS) JCS staffing of the CINCPAC plan went through several stages. The first attempt was returned to the Joint Staff on instructions of the Service Operations Deputies and directed to be prepared as two separate actions rather than one, namely, a J-3 paper addressing

¹State-Defense Msg to U.S. Ambassador Saigon 152239Z Apr 65, TS, LIMDIS

²Msg, JCS 9310 to CINCPAC info COMUSMACV et al, 171800Z Apr 65, TS.

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the operational aspects and a J-4 paper dealing with logistics. At the JCS meeting¹ on 14 April the Chiefs decided that the two should be consolidated into a single paper by the Joint Staff. Briefly for a while the USAF position was that, in light of the 13 April SecDef meeting the whole proposal had been overtaken and invalidated and should be dropped from further consideration. Nevertheless, the following day the JCS adopted the consolidated version and agreed to approve the proposals contained therein. Since the 16 April Presidential meeting had not expressly indicated otherwise, the resulting JCS recommendation forwarded to the SecDef on 17 April via JCSM 288-65 was essentially the substance of the CINCPAC plan.¹ It too called for commitment of a three-division force (expanded) and supporting troops, but with certain important changes. Indeed it contemplated as many forces ultimately, and the outline concept was retained intact. However, under the influence of the 13 April discussions with the SecDef, the initial forces to be introduced would be on a reduced scale and subsequent deployments would be at a somewhat slower pace stretched out over a longer period. The JCS submission was also less specifically a deployment plan than a proposed concept outline and statement of requirements.

(TS) The operational concept was identical with that in the CINCPAC plan. It projected an operational progression in four phases, beginning with the establishment of coastal enclaves and following through to extension of control over interior areas. Deployments would be keyed to these phases. The initial enclaves and the respective forces designated for them were also the same. The total magnitude provided for was still the three-division force augmented by the 173rd Airborne Brigade (to be relieved), plus an abbreviated Corps headquarters with minimal Corps troops and the brigade of the 25th Infantry Division []

¹JCSM 288-65 to SecDef, 17 Apr 65 "Concept for and Logistic Actions Required to Support Expedited Introduction of Additional Forces into Southeast Asia (U)", derived from JCS 2343/564-5, TS.

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(TS) Recommended deployment phasing was in three increments. Annex A scheduled the first priority for deployment. These consisted of 17,100 logistic support forces and security forces for their protection, plus an additional 14,000 Marines of the III MEF and 4000 Army troops of the 173rd Airborne Brigade. This initial force totaling 35,100 was to be deployed now so as to be in-country by 15 July 1965. The second increment, in Annex B, was the remainder of the three-division force, all to be in-country within 77 days after the national decision authorizing their deployment. This would provide, along with the first increment in Annex A, a total in-country by that date of 114,200 additional forces in South Vietnam and 10,030 additional in Thailand. Included in the above total were five USAF TFSS, three RTFs, and two TCSs. Annex C gave other WESTPAC and Southeast Asia deployments, not part of the three-division plan, amounting to 35,000 more forces that would be deployed as promptly as feasible but on a lesser priority basis.¹

(TS) Thus, the grand total of additional deployments proposed, came to 194,330, the overwhelming bulk of which was to be in place before the end of July 1965. Added to the existing in-country strength at the time of approximately 37,000 in South Vietnam and some 7000 in Thailand, but not counting naval elements operating in adjacent waters, the cumulative total of forces committed would reach over 238,000 by midyear or shortly thereafter.

(TS) The same day, 17 April, the JCS advised CINCPAC and COMUSMACV of the substance of what had been proposed to the SecDef.²

(TS) Meantime, earlier on 17 April the Ambassador in Saigon, learning what was afoot, was moved to go on record once again to register his strong objections to what he saw as a rapidly crystallizing trend to go far beyond the circumscribed scope of the 1 April decision. He had detected efforts actively being pursued to put, by his count,

¹Ibid, TS.

²Msg, JCS 9313 to CINCPAC et al 171847Z Apr 65, TS, LIMDIS.

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no less than twenty U.S. and third-country maneuver battalions into South Vietnam. A documented recapitulation of the specific step by step developments in this direction was provided in support of the charge. He therefore urged the SecState and the Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs to intercede and seek a formal national policy determination on whether the U.S. decision indeed was to embark on such a radical course of action that would alter the fundamental character of the war and the U.S. role in it. If so, then the U.S. should go about it in a more responsible and systematic fashion. Of particularly deep concern to him was the failure to consult with the GVN on a matter that had such momentous significance to the South Vietnamese.¹ His forthright protestations and explicit recommendations, however, had little effect. They elicited no action or response to clarify either the substantive ambiguity or the procedural irregularities surrounding the events now in train. The Ambassador's forceful views, expressed here and earlier, nonetheless did prove to have a measure of indirect influence in slowing down somewhat the headlong pace of developments.

SECDEF CUTBACK OF THE THREE-DIVISION PROPOSAL

(TS) Upon receipt of the JCS 17 April proposal, the SecDef was taken aback by the sheer proportions of the force commitment recommended. Mindful of the difficulties recently experienced in getting approval for just two comparatively minor combat contingents, he concluded that the atmosphere was not ripe for launching anything on this order. His immediate reaction was to call a special second conference forthwith, this time confining it to selected principals most directly concerned, and with the avowed purpose of editing down force requirements to the austere minimum. COMUSMACV and the U.S. Ambassador in Saigon were asked to join, and the SecDef, accompanied by the CJCS, the Assistant SecDef (ISA), and the Assistant SecState (East Asian and Pacific Affairs), met with them and CINCPAC, at Honolulu on 19-20 April.²

¹EMBTEL Saigon 3423 to SecState 170935Z Apr 15, TS, EXDIS.

²NMCC EA Records, TS; interview No. 1, TS; CINCPAC Command History 1965, Vol I, 2 May 1966, TS.

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(TS) Under the prodding of the SecDef, and with the encouragement of the Ambassador, the basis of a new, radically reduced deployment plan was hammered out. The three-division concept as such was not abandoned out of hand, but the perspective was shifted to concentrate only on what was absolutely essential now in the real and urgent present, deferring future requirements to be addressed when and as circumstances dictated. Partly in deference to the Ambassador's strategic assumption that the purpose of U.S. military presence still remained one of supporting the Vietnamese armed forces, the guiding rationale was that combat deployments should be defensive and tentative. Their role was to hold on until the ARVN could be rebuilt and resume the main brunt of fighting their own war.

(TS) It was therefore determined that the extent of the current commitment should be on the order of about 55,000 total additional personnel, including both U.S. and third country; in other words, approximately half of that recommended by CINCPAC and the JCS. Furthermore, it was also stipulated that the number of maneuver battalions to be fielded within this ceiling would be cut back from the contemplated 34 to 12, and the five TFs to three. Peremptory or even arbitrary as the decisions might appear, the JCS were charged with preparing an appropriate revised deployment program accordingly.¹

(S) Although the restrictive force level decided upon represented all that was agreed to and approved for the present, its adoption was not intended to prejudice, let alone preclude, the possibility of subsequent increases later. In theory, the commitment at any given time would be open-ended, subject to change for cogent reason. But for now this was the firm upper limit, sufficient to the strategy being followed, namely, deploying only enough ground forces to ensure that the war was not lost in the south. The experience would prove to be a precedent for what became thereafter a characteristic pattern of the buildup -- formal military requirements severely

¹Ibid, TS; JCS 2343/564-6 and 7, TS.

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cut back, rejected, or ignored when tendered, then eventually fulfilled de facto in piecemeal increments.

(TS) As soon as the SecDef returned from the special Honolulu conference he formally conveyed the results to the President for decision. He recommended approval and immediate implementation, between now and the end of August, for deployment of 48,000 more U.S. and 5250 Allied (ROK/ANZAC) troops to South Vietnam, plus three more USMC tactical air squadrons. At the same time he advised that further deployments amounting to approximately another 56,000 personnel might be necessary but would be deferred for later consideration. The SecDef also recommended that the President inform Congressional leaders of the decision action, specifically of the additional troops and the international flavor of the commitment, as well as of the fact that the mission of U.S. forces was being changed to a combat role.¹

THE EIGHT-BATTALION REDUCED PROGRAM

(TS) Meanwhile, the CJCS, laden with explicit terms of reference - tantamount almost to a plan - initiated the preparation of an emasculated deployment proposal as directed. Dutifully the Joint Staff undertook to develop a corresponding revised program, now little more than a staffing of details. At the end of the month the JCS went through the formality of agreeing on the product and it was submitted to the SecDef on 30 April via JCSM 321-65.

(TS) The new program designed to comply with the preconfigured parameters laid down in Honolulu, provided for deployment of the predetermined figure of 48,000 U.S. and 5250 Allied (ROK/ANZAC) troops, with the recommendation that it be approved for implementation now. A separate appendix, however, contained a list of other forces for possible deployment later, which was identified as being for information only; this was the rest of the three-division force, totaling another 56,000 U.S./ROK troops. Included in the recommendation proper was the breakdown of the forces to be deployed initially, as follows:

¹ Memo SecDef for the President, 21 April 1965, TS.

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- a. Eight U.S. maneuver battalion equivalents to South Vietnam, plus three tactical air squadrons and logistic support, together making a total of approximately 48,000.
- b. Four third-country battalion equivalents (ROK/ANZAC) to South Vietnam, for a total of 5250.

These deployments would bring the U.S. in-country total strength up to 69,000, and with the additional Allied forces make a grand total of about 75,000. Notation was also made of the possibility of 12 more U.S. and 6 more ROK battalions following at a later time, although not recommended now. Nothing was provided [] for WESTPAC.¹

(TS) Two weeks later, on 15 May, the SecDef responded to JCSM 321-65. Despite the JCS proposal faithfully adhering to what had already been decided upon in Honolulu earlier and what the SecDef had recommended to the President on 21 April, it received only partial and qualified approval. The SecDef approved the general program for planning purposes. But with respect to implementation of the JCS-recommended deployments, the response was strangely ambiguous and evasive, possibly reflecting the reception it received in the White House. The SecDef stated, "I am of the opinion that there exists U.S. Government approval for items 7, 8, and 14 [less 691 spaces]," which referred to the ROK and ANZAC troop units and most of the U.S. individual personnel augmentation. Everything else, i.e., the bulk of the program, was left in abeyance. The JCS were advised that deployments other than those in the items named - in other words, any U.S. combat units to be introduced - would be considered as they came up "in conjunction with continuing high-level deliberations on the Southeast Asia situation."²

INTERIM AD HOC DEPLOYMENTS

(S) By this date, however, the 30 April JCS proposal and the SecDef response had in effect been both relegated to a post facto

¹JCSM 321-65 for SecDef, 30 Apr 65, TS; JCS 2343/564-7, TS.

²SecDef Memo for CJCS 15 May 65, reproduced in N/H JCS 2343/564-8, TS.

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academic formality. In the interim, the program itself had been largely overtaken by events and was rapidly being superseded by larger deployment proposals already in process.

(S) Meanwhile, the focus of U.S. concern, hitherto concentrated on Southeast Asia, was diverted by serious problems elsewhere that were at once more pressing and closer to home. On 24 April, the Dominican Republic crisis broke and the U.S. found itself now confronted with two contingencies on opposite sides of the world simultaneously. The new crisis dominated the attention of the Government and the military establishment briefly and remained a vexing pre-occupation for an extended period, in many regards as a competing priority at the expense of interest in Vietnam. Its operational requirements tended to restrain the generating of major new deployment proposals for Southeast Asia, but those in train were not materially affected and continued to be carried out much as planned. In fact, the Marine deployment to Chu Lai was increased.

(TS) Toward the latter part of April COMUSMACV began having second thoughts about the adequacy of the Marine force destined for Chu Lai. By now the Marines already deployed in-country had been blooded. A patrol exchanged fire with the VC outside Da Nang in a sustained fire fight on 22 April, and the first conventional tactical engagement of U.S. combat troops in South Vietnam occurred three days later, on the 25th, when the VC attacked Marine outposts near the Da Nang Air Base, killing two Americans and wounding four others. On 26 April COMUSMACV advised CINCPAC and the JCS that, after restudy of the Chu Lai requirements in the light of recent experience and the general enemy situation, the originally proposed 5000-man force for local security would not be enough. He requested a full regiment of Marine troops instead of just the two BLTs, plus a proportional reinforcing of air elements and logistic support.¹ CINCPAC concurred, inasmuch as the increase had been discussed at the 20 April Honolulu conference, at which time the base figure was raised from 5000 to

¹Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC and JCS 261206Z, Apr 65, TS.

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6200 and a construction battalion was added. There followed considerable confusion, however, regarding the destination, timing, and size of the deployment.

(TS) For a while the Joint Staff was under the impression that this contingent of Marines was also supposed to go in at Da Nang, rather than Chu Lai. No sooner was this corrected than it was learned that the Commander, Fleet Marine Force Pacific, acting on his own initiative in accordance with the decision reached at the 20 April Honolulu conference, had already ordered movement of the forces.¹ When this in turn was straightened out and preparations were allowed to continue, it became apparent that the size of the force to be deployed might well exceed 6200. The JCS asked for verification that the strength would indeed be 6200 as approved, and wanted to know the details of unit composition.² Upon being informed that the total number would actually be 7015, organized as a Marine Expeditionary Brigade, the JCS on 30 April revised the authorized strength and formally directed deployment to Chu Lai of an MEB consisting of three battalion equivalents and three air squadrons from III MEF, for a total of 7015 personnel.³ Then the question arose as to whether this included the construction personnel as well. It was finally established and confirmed that 7015 was the number of combat personnel involved, while the construction battalion (USMC) and logistic support troops would amount to an additional 1378, making a total initial strength of 8393 to be deployed to Chu Lai.⁴

(TS) While the Marine deployment was being carried out it was decided that connotations of the word "expeditionary" in the term MEF, designating the USMC organization that would now be ashore in South Vietnam, were undesirable for reasons of political sensitivity

¹NMCC EA Records, TS.

²Msg, JCS 1012 to CINCPAC 291839, Apr 65, TS, LIMDIS.

³Msg, JCS 1141 to CINCPAC et al 301829Z Apr 65, TS; DJSM 543-65 for SecDef, 6 May 65, reproduced in N/H JCS 2343/564-7, TS.

⁴Msg, JCS 1197 to CINCPAC 010012Z May 65, TS; Msg CINCPAC 010808Z to COMUSMACV 1 May 65, TS.

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and should be euphemized. Orders were issued that henceforth it would be referred to as III Marine "Amphibious" Force (III MAF). The ground elements began landing at Chu Lai on 7 May as an amphibious task force. Two of the air squadrons bedded down on 28 May and one arrived later, July. By June, seven of the nine battalions of the 3rd Marine Division were deployed within South Vietnam, as well as the bulk of III MAF air components. Of the remaining two BLTs, one was in Okinawa as WESTPAC amphibious reserve, and one BLT was maintained afloat as the Seventh Fleet Surface Landing Force (SLF). This brought the total USMC in-country strength to 16,500 troops, counting some 5000 from separate support units.¹ Replacement Marines to reconstitute WESTPAC contingency reserve and to back up those committed to Vietnam began to arrive in Okinawa in late June directly from CONUS, and the last two remaining BLTs of III MAF, with the rest of the air and support elements, were deployed to South Vietnam early in July.²

(TS) Simultaneously with the Marines for Chu Lai, deployment of the 173rd Airborne Brigade was also being carried out. On 30 April the JCS directed that the 173rd be deployed from its permanent station in Okinawa to the Bien Hoa-Vung Tau areas in South Vietnam on a temporary basis until replaced.³ First elements were airlifted beginning 3 May, with all three battalions closing on 7 May.⁴ Arrival of the 173rd constituted the first U.S. Army ground combat commitment in South Vietnam. Its mission, like that of the USMC troops that preceded it, was to engage in combat counterinsurgency operations. Once deployed there, however, its intended short stay proved of longer duration than planned and it never did return to Okinawa. Because of the DomRep crisis occurring in the interim, most CONUS airborne resources were committed or otherwise obligated in connection with this contingency and thus not available for replacement of the 173rd.

¹Msg, CINCPAC to JCS 162216Z May 65, TS; USMACV Command History 1965 op.cit., TS; III MAF History March-September 1965, TS.

²NMCC EA Records, TS; USMACV Command History 1965, op.cit., TS.

³Msg, JCS 1141 to CINCPAC et al 301829Z Apr 65, TS.

⁴Hq, USMACV History 1965, op.cit., TS.

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These commitments lasted many months. Several alternate replacements for the 173rd were considered, for a while a brigade of the 101st Airborne Division being proposed, but in view of the critical need for the 173rd where it was, its relief was deferred.¹ Finally on 7 July the status of the 173rd was changed from temporary to permanent assignment in South Vietnam.²

(S) Thus by the end of May ten U.S. maneuver battalions were in-country: three USMC at Da Nang and one at Phu Bai, three USMC at Chu Lai, and three U.S. Army at Bien Hoa-Vung Tau. Combined total U.S. military strength in South Vietnam, including combat units and support forces of all Services, was 51,728. Between 29 May and 10 June the Australian infantry battalion, representing one-fourth of Australia's ground combat resources, also arrived, accompanied by its own logistic support company. The New Zealand artillery battery and signal detachment followed about a month later.³ ROK combat troops did not arrive until October, although over 2000 Korean military support personnel, mostly engineers, had been there since March.

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¹CINCPAC Command History 1965, Vol II, op.cit., TS; NMCC EA Records, TS; Interview No. 01, TS.

²Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV et al 070246Z July 65, TS; Memo, Assistant SecDef (ISA) for SecDef I-24831/65 24 July 65, 2.

³CINCPAC Command History 1965, op.cit., TS.

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(S) Relatively modest as the U.S. force commitment was, side effects of the drain on military resources were already beginning to tell. As early as April the mounting deployment demands were placing Service capabilities under strain. Outright shortages were occurring, and limited CONUS resources brought into conflict competing allocation priorities between Southeast Asia needs and other overseas military commitments elsewhere. There were increasingly frequent occasions of resorting to the expediency of dipping into assets earmarked for Europe in order to meet specific Vietnam requirements. The problem was becoming real and acute. Therefore, in recognition that the practice had started - and concern lest it get worse - the SecDef on 26 April forbade any recourse to NATO drawdown. He directed that no NATO-committed force or equipment would be diverted from such assignment to PACOM without prior written approval in each case by the SecDef or the Deputy SecDef.

(TS) Thereafter, except for some Air Force units, there was little direct major withdrawal affecting U.S./NATO posture. Tight controls were exercised; for example, in one instance even the diverting of a 10-kw power generator had to be given special authorization. Indirectly, however, the U.S. military position, especially in Germany, was seriously degraded by the time the buildup was in full swing, to the extent that it brought formal expressions of concern by the Minister of Defense of West Germany. Discussion of the qualitative impact that Southeast Asia deployments had in this respect, particularly regarding NATO, is deferred for a following section of the study.

JCS RECLAMA OF THE PROGRAM REDUCTION AND THE CSAF DEMURRER

(TS) Despite past JCS deployment proposals having experienced austere editing downward, especially in the case of the most recent

¹Message JCS 9375 to CINCPAC, DEPCOMUSMACTHAI et al, 200010Z April 1965, ~~SECRET~~; message Joint State/Defense 1953 to Bangkok 200719Z May 1965, ~~SECRET~~; message Amembassy Bangkok 1869 to State 251458Z May 1965, ~~SECRET~~; message JCS 3065 to CSA, CINCSTRIKE et al, 282110Z May 1965, ~~SECRET~~.

²Memo, SecDef for Service Secretaries, et al, 26 April 1965, ~~SECRET~~.

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one, a fresh attempt was again made on 19 May to up the level of force commitment to Vietnam. This latest resulted from a CJCS-initiated examination of deployment needs oriented to the DRV/ChiCom threat, which was originally set in motion in March, and was based on CINCPAC's reply establishing requirements in relation to that threat. Indeed the context was now somewhat altered because of changed circumstances, but it nevertheless afforded an opportunity to make another bid for more forces. The proposal was forwarded to the SecDef as a split decision, with the CSAF in nonconcurrence, and was expressly identified as being "for information."¹

(TS) In this memorandum the JCS acknowledged that the probability of large-scale overt DRV/ChiCom intervention appeared unlikely at the moment. They, less the CSAF, nevertheless were proposing deployment of considerably more forces. The proposed forces were designed primarily to improve U.S. capability to conduct counterinsurgency operations, but at the same time to deter and defend against possible overt aggression from outside. Present requirements, they pointed out, were substantially larger than but compatible with previous JCS deployment recommendations, citing in particular that of 30 April. Their current submission contemplated raising in-country strength by an additional 117,000 U.S. and approximately 20,000 ROK/ANZAC, bringing the level to a grand total on the order of 173,000 U.S./Allied forces eventually. The program called for deployment of the earlier proposed full three-division force, plus two additional brigades and the ANZAC battalion, in South Vietnam, [

] as well as five more TFSS to WESTPAC.

(TS) The body of the JCSM contained a brief of the CSAF demurrer. He did not agree with the CJCS and the other Chiefs on the stated deployment requirements. Although endorsing present actions now underway regarding Vietnam, he took exception to the rationale and the strategic principle implied in the new proposal. The focus of

¹JCS 2339/182, TS.

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his opposition was addressed essentially to the premise of any large-scale commitment of U.S. forces on the Asian mainland in order to resolve a confrontation with the ChiComs.¹ This marked the crystallization of what would become thereafter a consistent USAF position on Vietnam strategy, namely, strong reservations about extending U.S. involvement in the ground war.²

(S) There was no formal response to the May 19 JCS proposal. Apparently no reaction had been expected. Hardly a reclama, the whole matter had only been pursued as an academic gesture for the record - as witness labeling the nature and purpose of the memorandum from the start as being for information. A kind of negative national decision, influenced by the views of the U.S. Ambassador in Saigon and others of like mind in Washington, then prevailed, to the effect that no further expansion of the level of U.S. commitment would be considered for the time being. Firm determination notwithstanding, events would soon contrive otherwise.

¹JCSM 376-65 to SecDef 19 May 65, TS.

²Van Staaveren, Jacob, USAF Plans and Operations in Southeast Asia, 1965, USAF Historical Division, Liaison Office, Oct 1966, passim, TS.

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CHAPTER III

U.S. ENTRY IN THE GROUND WAR AS COBELLIGERENT

THE CRISIS STAGE IN THE MILITARY SITUATION

(TS) In the next two months the military situation in South Vietnam came close to collapsing. Late spring had brought a series of alarming reports of deterioration, in the absolute sense of ARVN decline as well as in relative terms of friendly-enemy OB balance, and the seriousness of conditions was compounded by imminent prospects of both trends worsening.¹ On 27 May the JCS were prompted to apprise the SecDef formally of the unfavorable state of the friendly situation and of the concomitant improvement in enemy capability. They advised, furthermore, that there were strong indications that the Communists were planning a greatly increased effort in Southeast Asia.²

(TS) With ARVN forces suffering major reverses and showing signs of disintegrating, concern in Washington rapidly mounted to an acute stage. On 4 June the CJCS, in a personal message of a certain special category, requested the assessments and views of COMUSMACV and CINCPAC as to requirements for possible increased deployments to South Vietnam in light of the deteriorating situation in I and II Corps areas.³ COMUSMACV answered in a long message on 7 June and CINCPAC quickly concurred in his own reply shortly afterward that same day.

(TS) COMUSMACV first described how bad the situation was. He explained that the expected buildup of local ARVN forces which everyone

¹Msgs, COMUSMACV 17983 to CINCPAC info JCS 280927Z May 65, TS; CINCPAC to JCS 020331Z June 65, and 052302Z June 65, TS; Interview No. 01, TS.

²JCSM 415-65 for SecDef 27 May 65, TS.

³Msg, JCS 2080-65 (CJCS sends) to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV 042301Z June 65 (separate channels and procedures), TS.

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had been counting on would not be realized. In fact, because of extremely high desertion rates and high casualties, several battalions having recently been decimated - the ARVN was disintegrating as a fighting force, whereas the enemy was in the ascendancy, getting stronger all the time. Presence of organized North Vietnamese army units of regimental size had been established. The prognosis was that force ratios would continue to change, now faster than ever, in favor of the VC. Even the integrity of the relatively small U.S. military combat forces would soon have to be considered. Precarious as the existing situation was already, everything pointed to the enemy moving the conflict to a new and higher level of intensity. Under the circumstances, therefore, he saw no alternative but to reinforce present U.S. forces with additional U.S. or third-country troops.

(S) COMUSMACV then recommended immediate deployment of the remaining two BLTs of the III Marine Division, plus associated air and support elements, totaling approximately 8000 personnel. At the same time he requested one other Marine brigade be provided immediately to augment the III MAF, which of necessity would have to come from CONUS since the foregoing two BLTs would have exhausted the last of the WESTPAC Marine reserves. Besides the above forces to be deployed immediately, he also recommended preparations for deploying the following as soon as possible:

- a. One U.S. Army Airmobile division.
- b. One U.S. Army Corps Hq and a cadre of Corps troops.
- c. One ROK Marine RCT.
- d. Remainder of a ROK division.
- e. Additional TFSSs.
- f. Combat support and logistic forces for the above.

(S) These COMUSMACV recommendations would thus provide for deploying 25 additional maneuver battalions. When implemented, the U.S. portion of the total force commitment would amount to 25 U.S. battalions deployed in-country. However, COMUSMACV cautioned that yet more forces would be required over and above the goal of 25

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additional battalions currently recommended. He estimated that at least another nine battalions (equivalent to a division) would be needed, and these would probably have to be U.S. troops. He accordingly advised that planning begin now for deploying this follow-on increment later. Before closing, COMUSMACV indicated that the substance of the message had been discussed with the Ambassador in Saigon.¹ As it later turned out, though, the Ambassador was not in complete agreement with the stated force requirements.

(S) CINCPAC's response to the CJCS query fully concurred in the pessimistic assessment of the grave situation, and, except for reservations regarding certain details, generally seconded the force deployment recommendations.²

THE STRATEGY DEBATE

(S) Receipt of COMUSMACV's message had an immediate impact. On the political side, the Ambassador in Saigon was called home to Washington for emergency consultations at once, while the JCS, the Joint Staff, and the Services directed their attention to the urgent military problem at hand. In the process, some of the basic issues of policy and strategy bearing upon the conduct of the Vietnam war, hitherto not fully articulated, were formally brought out into the open and partially addressed.

(S) Most of the military community was predisposed to respond favorably to the MACV deployment requirement on its own merit, on the practical basis of cogent and self-evident military needs of the moment in the context of existing U.S. policy. Such a course was seen as consistent with a national commitment already made much earlier and with national objectives established long before.³ A more fundamental question, at once underlying and transcending the pragmatic military aspects of the issue of the moment regarding deployment of more forces, was raised by the Air Force.

¹Msg, COMUSMACV 19118 to CINCPAC, JCS et al 070340Z June 65, ~~TS~~.

²Msg, CINCPAC to JCS 072325Z June 65, ~~TS~~.

³Talking Paper, J-3 TP 32-64, 7 June 65, ~~TS~~.

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(S) In the series of JCS conferences set in motion by the MACV submission, the CSAF from the beginning opposed JCS approval of the requirements and the proposal that such deployments be recommended to the SecDef. On 8 June in a formal memorandum to the JCS he registered the AF's nonconcurrence position on the otherwise favorable response that the other Chiefs had more or less already agreed to. He pressed instead for a halt until the whole basic problem could be studied. More than just weighing the ramifications and implications, he wanted a thorough systematic reexamination of premises and rationale before deciding whether to make the commitment or not. First, in the interests of fixing elemental facts, he felt there should be a definitive assessment of the state of the military situation, to use as a basis for determining what the actual force requirements were. Secondly, there should be an appraisal of the political circumstances in Vietnam, to use as a basis for estimating what the prospects were that such forces would be to any avail. Finally, in the light of both conditions, there should be a reevaluation of U.S. policy and posture toward Southeast Asia, to use as a basis for judging the desirability of making such a commitment in preference to other measures or other courses. The CSAF accordingly proposed holding the decision in abeyance pending the outcome of three prior steps:

- a. A JCS-initiated request for the USIB to undertake immediate preparation of a full-dress SNIE as a matter of urgency on the military situation in South Vietnam [strangely, no such national intelligence estimate had yet been produced].
- b. The JCS meeting with Ambassador Taylor scheduled for 9 June to review the political situation in South Vietnam.
- c. The JCS consider an overall strategy for Southeast Asia.¹

(S) But the attempted demarche was too late. Time proved to be the determinant. The national decision-making system, in waiting

¹CSAFM 72-65 for JCS, 8 June 65, TS; JCS 2343/602, TS.

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so long to address the basic issues, had allowed any other conceivable alternatives to lapse, and thereby in effect denied itself the luxury of discriminate choice. The die had been cast by events and the U.S. could only react, almost as a reflex. The last option left was delay - which was partially exercised.

(TS) When the Ambassador in Saigon visited Washington, his assessment, in consultations with the JCS, as well as with the State Department, White House and others, corroborated that the military and political situation in South Vietnam was indeed serious, though not of crisis proportions necessitating desperate emergency measures. He recognized the need for more forces but did not advocate anything approaching a crash buildup, nor did he particularly subscribe to the advisability of greatly increasing the ground force commitment under any circumstances. Apparently his position with respect to the specific issue of deployments then being considered was essentially negative. However, as noted at the time by a number of key military participants in the strategic debate going on, the Ambassador offered no substitute proposals for coping with what was regarded in the military view as the real and immediate problem at hand, namely, imminent collapse of the situation beyond hope of retrieval.¹

(TS) The JCS, confronted by what in its own technical context was a bona fide military need - and in the absence of policy reference to the contrary - tended to look upon the recommended deployment in objective terms as a straightforward military requirement. As such, it was valid, adequately justified, and should be met. Prompt action was imperative. Time constraints largely precluded following through on the points raised by the CSAF, despite their cogency. Nevertheless an effort was made to satisfy them as far as possible. Rather than trying to get an SNIE produced, the JCS themselves had the Joint Staff conduct (mostly via telephone) an informal

¹Talking Paper, J-3 TP 33-64, 9 June 65, TS; NMCC EA Records, TS; Interviews No. 01, 06, 08, 11, TS; New York Times, 12 June 65.

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polling of the various agencies making up the intelligence community, which confirmed that the military situation in Vietnam was some shade ranging from gloomy to foreboding. Ambassador Taylor had duly reported on the political situation. And at this late juncture, prior restudy of overall strategy was deemed both anachronistically out of order and materially irrelevant.¹

(TS) The rationale being employed by the CJCS and the other Chiefs (less CSAF), as well as by much of the Joint Staff, coincided with what COMUSMACV and CINCPAC were advocating. Besides immediate reactive concerns of the moment, they were constructively looking farther ahead from a common frame of reference. All those who favored the proposed additional deployments were striving for a substantial enough quantum jump in the buildup to be militarily meaningful. Instead of always lagging behind and just partly meeting enemy gains post facto with a trickle of additional troops as in the past - which never quite caught up with, let alone offset, the progressively widening discrepancy in desired force ratios - they wanted to see an abrupt increase in friendly strength of sufficient magnitude to overcome decisively the enemy advantage. As summed up by one of the senior military officers involved, it reduced itself to classic military principles of force application, where the time in which a given force is brought to bear, as well as its size, is a factor in the power equation.²

(TS) At the JCS meeting of 10 June the CSAF was prevailed upon to withdraw his nonconcurrence memorandum before the formal JCS decision was reached, thus technically avoiding a split decision. However, his demurrer was indirectly reflected in, and partially compensated for, in the resulting JCSM articulating the proposed course of action adopted. Having agreed to accept, with only minor modification, most of COMUSMACV's recommended force requirements, the

¹JCS 2343/602, TS.

²Interview No. 01, TS.

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JCS accordingly forwarded their deployment proposal on 11 June to the SecDef for national decision.¹

JCS 23-U.S. BATTALION DEPLOYMENT PROPOSAL

(TS) In their memorandum the JCS painted a dark picture of the military situation in Vietnam and urged further buildup at the most rapid rate feasible. Acknowledging that there was no formal USIB-sponsored national assessment in the form of an SNIE, they stated that an informal poll of the intelligence community revealed a consensus in agreement with COMUSMACV's estimate of the situation and prognosis. The dimensions and intensity of Communist efforts in Southeast Asia were being expanded, with enemy capability improving while that of RVN was diminishing. They cited: the increase in jet fighter and bomber aircraft and SA-2s deployed in DRV; elements of PAVN operating within South Vietnam; VC buildup in numbers and quality (training, equipment) with the enemy now prepared to launch major offensives at will; and ARVN ground forces in a precarious position and still deteriorating, so that soon force ratios in South Vietnam would further favor the enemy.

(TS) To deal with the twofold problem, the JCS therefore recommended two complementary sets of countermeasures: greater buildup of U.S. and Allied ground forces in South Vietnam as rapidly as feasible, in order to avoid loss of the war in the south; and simultaneously, increased air action against North Vietnam, in order to reduce DRV capabilities, punish the DRV, and further demonstrate U.S. determination and intent to prevent a Communist seizure of South Vietnam.

(TS) Attached to the JCSM was a proposed schedule of unit deployments for which the JCS recommended immediate approval and implementation as soon as possible. They first gave the approved strength figures as of 8 June as 69,593 U.S. (all Services), amounting to 13 U.S. battalions, and 1250 Allied (ANZAC battalion), though not all were in-country yet.

¹JCS 2343/602, TS.

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The 13-battalion U.S. figure, for example, included an Army brigade (of the 101st Airborne) approved to replace the 173rd Airborne, but not firmly designated for deployment. Then they requested the following additional forces be deployed:

- a. Remaining two BLTs of III MAF with support and air elements.
- b. One U.S. Army Airmobile Division..
- c. Corps Headquarters.
- d. ROK Marine Regimental Combat Team.
- e. One ROK Division (-).
- f. Four TFSs with support elements.
- g. Combat support and logistic support forces for above.

The only deletion from MACVs requirements list was the one extra USMC brigade he asked for, which was partly accommodated under the present approved strength according to JCS interpretation. Otherwise, the JCS were honoring the entire requirement almost verbatim as submitted. These additional deployments would give a total in-country strength of 116,793 U.S. and 19,750 Allied, providing for 23 U.S. battalions (instead of MACV's goal of 25) and 10 Allied (ROK/ANZAC) battalions - or a grand total of 136,543 U.S./Allied personnel and 33 U.S./Allied battalions.¹ It was equivalent to the size of force contemplated in the original three-division concept plus a 20 percent increase.

(S) The substance of the JCS proposal, and the reasons for it, had been conveyed earlier to most of the decision-making principals. On the same day as the date of the JCSM, at 1215 hours on 11 June, a special NSC meeting was convened at the White House to consider the situation in Vietnam and the requirement for additional force deployments. Attending, among others, were the SecDef, SecState, CJCS, and Ambassador Taylor. After long discussion of the whole problem, no decision on deployments was taken. Nevertheless, the Chairman, upon returning from the NSC meeting, felt that the U.S. had no recourse

¹JCSM-457-65 for SecDef, 11 June 65, (S).

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but to deploy more forces and inevitably such a decision would be forthcoming. In anticipation, during his debriefing of the JCS the same day, he therefore directed that alerting messages be sent to CINCPAC and to the headquarters of those forces probably involved in early deployments.¹

(TS) A series of alert messages was accordingly sent that same evening.² This was followed by a recapitulation advising CINCPAC and COMUSMACV of the status of response to the recommended force requirement, as it was then developing. No reference was made to the ROK forces, and it was stated that the full U.S. division, i.e., the U.S. Army Airmobile Division, would probably not be made available for prompt deployment at this time. However, the following additional deployments to South Asia were listed as being under active consideration as alternatives to the earlier recommendation:

- a. USMC - two BLTs, one F-4B squadron and support elements (remainder of III MAF) - totaling approximately 8000 personnel.
- b. U.S. Army - One brigade with support elements, designated by CSA to be from the 1st Infantry Division (but only two of the three battalions were available for the present) - ETA 15 July 65.
- c. U.S. Army - One brigade, with support elements of the 101st Airborne Division - ETA 28 July 65 (but also retaining the 173rd Airborne Brigade now deployed in-country).
- d. U.S. Army - Corps Headquarters.
- e. USAF - Four TFSS and support elements - totaling approximately 2500 personnel.

The JCS then requested, as soon as possible, a list of logistic and other support forces that would be required for the above.³ The total

¹Jt. Secretariat Note to Control Division, 11 Jun 65, ~~TS~~.

²Msgs, JCS 3771 to CSAF, CINCPAC, CINCPAC, et al 112108Z Jun 65, ~~TS~~; JCS 3772 to CINCPAC info COMUSMACV et al 112116Z Jun 65, ~~TS~~; JCS 3773 to CSA, CINCPAC, CINCPAC, et al 112119Z Jun 65, ~~TS~~.

³Msg, JCS 3809 to CINCPAC info COMUSMACV 112347Z Jun 65, ~~TS~~.

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thus would come to something on the order of 21,000 additional personnel and provide for only seven more battalions. It was considerably less than half of what COMUSMACV requested.

(U) This proved to be an accurate projection of all that would actually be approved at that time.

(U) That part of the JCS recommendation pertaining to increased air action, advocated by USAF, occasioned a review of present U.S. air capability in the area. Earlier, in late May, CINCPAC had discussed PACOM aircraft shortages.¹ A recapitulation of existing resources currently deployed was generated and revealed the following USAF-USN combat aircraft strength distribution as of 12 June:

South Vietnam In-Country

<u>USAF</u>	<u>USMC</u>	<u>USN</u>
48 A-1E	18 F-4	2 A-4
40 F-100	8 A-4	
13 F-102		
14 F-104		
23 B-57		
138	26	2

Total U.S. Combat Aircraft South Vietnam - 166

Vietnam Adjacent Waters (or Potentially Available for Southeast Asia Operations) USN CVAs

Coral Sea	64	Oriskany	84
Independence	78	Bon Homme Richard	99
Midway	47		

Total CVA Combat Aircraft - 372 USN

Elsewhere in WESTPAC

Guam (USAF)	42 B-52	Taiwan	14 total all types
Philippines	124 total all types	Japan	137 total all types
Okinawa	107 total all types	South Korea	48 total all types

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Msg, CINCPAC to JCS et al 260027Z May 65.

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(S) The substantial air capability in-being notwithstanding, the proposed increase in air action fared even worse than the recommended ground force deployments. No significant stepped-up bombing on the order contemplated by CSAF and recommended by JCS was permitted at that time. However, one important indirect effect was to speed up implementation of ARC LIGHT, the use of Guam-based B-52s for strikes in South Vietnam, which had been under consideration since April. ARC LIGHT I, the initial operation, was executed on 17 June, then repeated several times, and finally the series was put on a continuing basis.¹

APPROVAL OF 7 ADDITIONAL U.S. BATTALIONS

(S) No clear-cut national decision on the proposed deployment package as a whole emerged then or later, although all the forces were in fact deployed eventually. On the one hand, indications were given, or the JCS were allowed to infer, that the Administration planned to approve most of the requirement, with certain modifications (but as will be seen, these turned out to be significant changes in forces and times of deployment). On the other, public announcement by Administration spokesmen, as well as official comment, indicated that far fewer additional U.S. forces would be deployed than JCS, CINCPAC, and COMUSMACV recommended. The SecDef, in a news conference on 16 June, revealed that only an additional 21,000 troops would be sent to South Vietnam, bringing the total U.S. forces there to about 75,000.² It ended up in a tentative policy decision response amounting to equivocation. Nothing that the JCS had proposed and COMUSMACV requested was really turned down, but what was expressly and specifically approved for deployment meant a reduction by well over half of the stated military requirement, from 45,000 additional U.S. personnel to about 21,000. The rest was not disapproved, but rather, approval was implied though postponed for determination later. The record reveals

¹Msg, JCS 1047 to CINCPAC, CINCSAC, 292141Z April 15, 65; JCS 4027 to CINCPAC, CINCSAC 161943Z June 65, 65; JCS 4384 to CINCPAC, CINCSAC 222104Z June 65, 65; JCS 2339/153, 65.

²New York Times, 17 June 65.

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no crisp statement, however, of such a national decision being rendered namely, one stipulating that for the time being only specified portions were approved and all else was in abeyance indefinitely.

(TS) At the 15 June JCS-SecDef meeting, adjustments in force levels were discussed in anticipation of the probable extent to which the recommended deployments would receive approval in the near future. In the case of the Army Airmobile Division, it was unlikely that it could be ready before August. The ROK division force was at some stage in the process of being negotiated. Both presumably would be available but in a different time frame than the one presently being addressed. Then on 17 June, in the JCS meeting with the SecDef, it was concluded that the Airmobile Division's specific deployment commitment would have to be pushed back even further to early fall rather than August, and it was accordingly approved with reservations contingent upon circumstances at the time of its availability. Definitely approved - actually a reconfirmation - was a brigade of the 101st Airborne Division, deployment of which had been conditionally agreed to more than a month earlier in another context. At that, it was intended only as a temporary stop-gap, to remain in South Vietnam until the Airmobile Division became operational, when it would be returned to CONUS. The 173rd Airborne Brigade now in-country, however, would be retained permanently. A brigade of the 1st Infantry Division (actually understrength by one battalion) was also firmly approved, as were the Army Corps Headquarters and the requirement for an as yet unspecified number of logistic and other support forces associated with these additional combat deployments. The four USAF TFSs and their support elements would deploy when appropriate airfield facilities under construction became available to receive them.¹

(TS) Before the close of the 17 June meeting, the SecDef instructed the JCS to prepare and submit an amended deployment program proposal, one complying with the new terms of reference

¹ NMCC EA Records, TS; Interviews No. 01 and 11, TS; JCS 2343/602-1, TS; Jt. Secretariat Note to Control Div (OJCS) 17 June 65, TS; Van Staaveren, op.cit., TS.

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just laid down. It amounted to being directed to recommend only that, which had already been approved.¹

(TS) The following day, 18 June, the JCS accordingly furnished the SecDef with the amended program as instructed. They pointed out that its provisions when implemented would result in 23 U.S. battalions deployed in South Vietnam, instead of meeting COMUSMACV's requirement for 25, and would deprive CINCPAC of his quick-reaction airborne assault capability on Okinawa (the 173rd Airborne Brigade) for contingencies elsewhere throughout the WESTPAC area.² In point of fact, the 23-battalion figure was a theoretical total, for it included the as yet unready Airmobile Division and it also assumed that a third battalion would eventually be added to the 2nd Brigade of the 1st Infantry Division. In terms of realistic lead time, the net effect was for a force commitment of only 7 more maneuver battalion equivalents to be deployed immediately.

(TS) Implementation of these approved deployments was undertaken with dispatch, though not without some problems being encountered in the process. For a while, despite the firm and explicit decision on deploying the last two remaining BLTs of III MAF, there was reluctance to do so in the absence of replacements to reconstitute PACOM's forward positioned Marine reaction force for other contingencies in WESTPAC. Briefly, the deployment was countermanded, then on again, then held up once more. The resulting confusion was finally dispelled when on 27 June CINCPAC interjected himself to state that the military situation was critical and the two BLTs with their air and supporting elements were needed immediately if U.S. forces were to hold their own. Arrangements were thereupon made for expediting the movement of additional Marines directly from CONUS to Okinawa, and the remainder of III MAF was ordered to sail at the end of the month, arriving at Da Nang early in July.³

¹JCS 2343/602-1, TS.

²JCSM 482-65 for SecDef 18 June 65, TS.

³NMCC EA Records, TS; Msg JCS 4497 CJCS to CINCPAC info COMUSMACV 241336Z June 65; Msg CINCPAC to JCS 270959Z June 65, TS; Msg JCS 4893 CINCPAC 011455Z July 65, TS; MACV Command History 1965, op.cit., TS.

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(S) The Marine BLTs were followed shortly by deployment of the two U.S. Army brigades provided for in the latest decision. The 2nd Brigade of the 1st Infantry Division began arriving in-country on 12 July, and the 1st Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division on 29 July. In August, the Corps Headquarters that had been approved was established at Nha Trang. At first, referred to as Task Force Alpha, it was redesignated, at OSD direction, as a Field Force Headquarters for political reasons. It was also constituted as a Joint organization, rather than exclusively U.S. Army, in recognition of the fact that it was intended to exercise operational control over forces of more than one Service.¹

(S) Deployment of the four TFSs that had been approved was another matter, however. Delay had been anticipated, but in addition to limitations in available airfield facilities, shortages in aircraft, pilots, and munitions were beginning to develop.² Well before the obstacles were overcome and these particular deployments actually completed, the requirement was overtaken by successively much larger ones projected still further into the future. The many problems of resource constraints affecting USAF deployments came to the fore later and will be discussed in a subsequent part of this study.

THE 34-U.S. BATTALION REQUIREMENT

(TS) The 18 June decision settling on an eventual 23-battalion U.S. commitment did not stand for long. In short order - within days - the whole issue of level of force deployment was reopened. Hard on its heels a reclama was entered, leading to a new round of proposals for a larger, faster buildup, which this time was partly successful. In retrospect the result, though by no means fixed and final, proved to be a breakthrough, culminating in the crossing of a quantitative threshold that for all practical purposes amounted to a point of no return. Thereafter, the U.S. was irrevocably committed to a primary role and inextricably caught in an ever deepening involvement in the ground war.

¹USMACV Command History 1965, op.cit., TS; Msg JCS 4561 to CINCPAC info COMUSMACV et al 242249Z June 65, S.

²Van Staaveren, USAF 1965, op.cit., TS.

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(S) Setting the stage were events within South Vietnam. Through the latter part of June, as suggested by CINCPAC's candor regarding deployment of the last of his Marine reserve from Okinawa, a sense of urgency prevailed among the responsible military authorities most directly concerned. It was becoming increasingly evident to them that the situation was bad and conditions were continuing to decline at an alarming rate. From a military view, the options were reducing themselves to a choice between two polarized policy alternatives: either withdrawal of U.S. forces and abandonment of present posture toward Southeast Asia would soon have to be considered; or there would have to be a rapid deployment buildup of substantially greater magnitude than the U.S. heretofore had been willing to make. A juncture had been reached where further military courses of action and a change in basic national policy were one.

(S) The effort to appeal the 23-battalion decision and seek readjustment upwards was triggered by a series of special category exclusive messages exchanged between the CJCS and COMUSMACV personally (CINCPAC also included as addressee). On 22 June the Chairman apprised COMUSMACV of the decision action and advised that the 23-battalion figure, which he explained included the Airmobile Division whose deployment was perforce delayed until later in the year, comprised all that could be firmly approved for now. He wanted to know whether such a force would be enough to convince the VC and DRV that they could not win. The CJCS followed this the same day with a request for a reappraisal of requirements and for comments on the effects of this force ceiling in light of a reassessment of the military situation and prospects in South Vietnam.¹

(S) Whereupon COMUSMACV responded, on 24 June, with strong objections to any implication that the 23 U.S. maneuver battalions should represent the upper level of force commitment. It was

¹Two special exclusive types of EYES ONLY messages personally from CJCS to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 22 June 65, S.

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insufficient to meet the existing critical situation and a great deal more was necessary in his view. He took occasion to point out that he had already previously requested one full division more than this approved level. Furthermore, because of deteriorating conditions since then, additional requirements over and above presently submitted recommendations were bound to be forthcoming. He was pessimistic about achieving a quick military victory to redress the situation over the foreseeable short term and expected a long war of attrition. The unfavorable balance could not be altered in the next six months, no matter what the U.S. did, for the period would have to be devoted to building up U.S. forces. Only then, during 1966, was there a possibility of seizing the initiative from the enemy, with still greater force increases necessary throughout the year. Ultimately, therefore, the total force requirement was likely to climb well beyond currently recognized needs.¹

(S) The CJCS was convinced that the JCS would have to make another effort to get more realistic force requirements validated and filled if there was to be any hope of maintaining the U.S. military position. But before a new bid could be initiated some basic facts had to be straightened out. What exactly was the force requirement? By now the successive overlapping of various requirements submissions was almost as ambiguous as the approvals for deployments of forces.

(TS) On 26 June the CJCS, again in a special type of message addressed to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV by name, asked for a restatement of force requirements. He was confused over the present level of currently recommended forces for MACV and wanted clarification. The Chairman gave his understanding that as of now the hard requirement recommendations came to a total of 34 U.S. maneuver battalions and 10 Allied battalions. He listed a recapitulation of his interpretation

¹Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 3237 to CJCS info CINCPAC (certain special exclusive category) 24 June 65; TS

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as being 25 U.S. battalions planned and 9 more proposed and being considered, for a U.S. total of 34, plus 1 ANZAC and 9 ROK battalions, for an Allied total of 10, all together making a grand total of 44 U.S./Allied maneuver battalions. He requested confirmation and whether, in view of continuing deteriorating trends in the military situation, this represented the extent of present force requirements.¹

(TS) COMUSMACV, in his reply to the CJCS the same day (also via special channels), confirmed the Chairman's interpretation of presently submitted requirements as being 34 U.S. battalions and 10 Allied, for a total force of 44 maneuver battalion equivalents. At the same time he outlined how these forces were to be employed based essentially on the enclave concept. However, he foresaw the probability of increased requirements being generated later on as developments unfolded. A rough projection of this expected future need was somewhere on the order of another 10 battalions or so. In other words, a new tentative force goal was now being suggested, namely, a 54-battalion level, which would call for 44 rather than 34 U.S. battalions. The following day, 27 June, CINCPAC indicated his concurrence in and support of COMUSMACV's requirements, adding that there should be more coastal enclaves established from which U.S. troops could expand. He too saw the situation as having reached a critical state, but he felt confident that with enough U.S. forces, and assuming that improved effectiveness of the Vietnamese armed forces and better cooperation of the populace were achieved, the U.S. could eventually succeed where France had failed.³

(TS) Later the same day, 27 June, COMUSMACV submitted a new requirements forecast for yet additional forces, but a derivative one devolving from and directly related to the 44-battalion U.S./Allied force level. It amounted to a request of considerable magnitude.

¹Special type of exclusive EYES ONLY Msg, CJCS to COMUSMACV and CINCPAC, 26 June 65, ~~TS~~.

²Special type of msg, COMUSMACV MAC 3275 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 26 June 65, ~~TS~~.

³Special type of msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 27 June 65, ~~TS~~.

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He asked for a total of 30 more Army and USMC airmobile and airlift units over and above the 27 already in-country or authorized and exclusive of those associated with the Airmobile Division. He broke down the helicopter requirements in support of the ground combat force as follows: for the 14 U.S. Army battalions - 330 aircraft; for the 12 USMC battalions (apparently this included the extra brigade requested over and above the III MAF) - 144 aircraft; for the 10 Allied battalions (9 ROK, 1 ANZAC) - 75 aircraft. COMUSMACV also indicated a need for 6 more TFSS (3 of fighters and 3 attack), for such a 44-battalion force.¹

(TS) Next morning, 28 June, the JCS met with the SecDef and the Service Secretaries. The seriousness of the Vietnam situation and COMUSMACV's deployment requirements were discussed at length. These were presented in terms of a total 44-maneuver-battalion force consisting of 34 U.S. battalions, raising U.S. strength to an estimated 175,000 personnel, plus 10 Allied battalions with a strength of approximately 19,750 personnel. No decision on the issue of increasing the scale of force deployments was reached at that particular session, but the SecDef was convinced of the need for a much larger U.S. commitment. He instructed the JCS to prepare for his consideration a new program proposal to provide for deploying such additional forces as were required to ensure that the VC/DRV "cannot win at their present level of commitment." At the same time the SecDef also directed that Army and Marine Corps resources be examined with respect to the capability of meeting the 34-U.S.-battalion requirement by 1 September. He was especially concerned about the helicopter support that was an integral part of the requirement. Finally, the SecDef stipulated, as criteria to be adhered to, that the JCS and Service planning approach be one of filling the requirement without withdrawing units from Europe or the Dominican Republic, and that the Airmobile Division be left intact.²

¹Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 3283 to CINCPAC and JCS 271800Z Jun 65, TS.

²JCS 2343/602-3, TS; J-3 Action Officer Briefing Sheet for CJCS, 29 June 65, TS.

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(TS) The Joint Staff was immediately set to work, in coordination with the Service Staffs, on producing a new deployment program proposal for a 34-battalion U.S. force. At the JCS meeting of 30 June some of the attendant problems were taken up, among them the formidable one of shortages in available helicopter resources. The Army did not have sufficient existing helicopter units to meet the requirement. To some extent it could improvise part of it from CONUS assets, and the Marine Corps had agreed to furnish four of its squadrons for Army support. This, however, would still fall far short of the requirement. Because of constraints of equipment production and crew-training limitations, there was little prospect of the shortfall being reduced significantly by 1 September. As expanded production of aircraft and training of personnel permitted, the remainder of the requirement would eventually be filled, but considerably after that date. At the earliest, the full requirement for the 34 U.S. battalions could not be satisfied before mid-December 1965; for the ROK division force, at best not until February 1966. For a 44-battalion U.S. force, such as was already being projected, the slippage would be proportionately worse. Interestingly, a tertiary force requirement, incidental to the derivative requirement of the helicopter forces themselves, was identified. Units to support these helicopter units also were required, such as headquarters, maintenance, etc., and these totalled about another 1000 personnel.¹ =

(TS) At the same JCS meeting of 30 June the CSAF took the opportunity once again to interject Air Force doubts regarding the wisdom of too precipitous a large-scale involvement in the ground war, and to interpose Air Force views on the general issue of strategic conduct of the war. To this end a formal memorandum presenting the Air Force position was introduced for JCS consideration in their discussion of the proposed deployment program. The CSAF favored only a ground force buildup of a scale and at a rate consonant with the coastal enclave concept, that is, holding back

¹J-3 TP 34-65, Talking Paper for CJCS, 30 Jun 65, ~~TS~~; JCS 2343/602-3, ~~TS~~.

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until an adequate and secure logistic base was established. Instead he opted for increased air actions, maintaining that operations directed against the DRV were the "essential key to the eventual defeat of the Viet Cong." So, once again he strongly advocated immediately intensifying the air-strike campaign against major military and industrial targets in North Vietnam, including the entire JCS recommended 94-Target List and other recently developed DRV capabilities.¹

(PS) The other Chiefs, however, were able to prevail upon the CSAF to avoid a split decision and agree to go along with the draft deployment program. In consideration, his recommendations regarding air action would be incorporated in the JCS proposal that would forward the program to the SecDef.

THE 2 JULY JCS PROGRAM PROPOSAL FOR 44 US/ALLIED BATTALIONS

(PS) On 2 July, after first coordinating with COMUSMACV, the JCS responded to the SecDef's instructions of 28 June and formally submitted their deployment program. It complied with the criteria he had imposed then, namely, to provide for deployment of such additional forces to South Vietnam as were required at this time to ensure that the VC/DRV cannot win at their present level of commitment, and as far as possible with the other terms of reference laid down. It identified additional forces to be deployed over those proposed in the previous JCS recommendation of 18 June (JCSM 482-65) oriented to a 23-U.S.-battalion level. The new program called for deployment of the remainder of the 1st Infantry Division (six more battalions), a separate Marine Amphibious Brigade (three more battalions), additional combat support and logistical elements, and retention of the Army brigade scheduled to be withdrawn (173rd Airborne). When implemented, it would result in a U.S. ground combat force of 34 maneuver battalions with appropriate supporting forces, together totaling approximately 179,000 U.S. military personnel, deployed in South Vietnam by September 1965. With the Allied forces, consisting of another

¹CSAFM-105-65 for JCS, 20 June 65, 28.

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10 battalions (9 ROK and 1 ANZAC) and amounting to 19,750 personnel, the grand total would be a 44-battalion force with a strength numbering over 198,750 in-country by late September. The JCS cautioned, however, that if the 9-battalion ROK division force, which was a firm part of the requirement, did not materialize, an additional U.S. division would have to be committed in its place. In that event, a 43-battalion U.S. force, instead of 34, would be needed.

(TS) In the body of their memorandum the JCS also advised that there were some problems which might cause slippages in deployment schedules for certain support elements and equipment. They referred to existing constraints in airlift and sealift transport resources, and to the limited production availability of helicopters and light aircraft. Furthermore, there might also be some other slippage depending upon MACV's ability to absorb and utilize additional forces of this magnitude in such short time.

(TS) Then, reflecting the views of the CSAF, the JCS added a final note advocating increased air strikes on North Vietnam. Concurrent with these ground-force deployments, they recommended immediate implementation of a full program of air actions directed against DRV targets as an indispensable component of overall U.S. military strategy for the Vietnam situation.¹

(TS) Immediately upon receipt of the 34-U.S.-battalion program the SecDef, meeting with the CJCS, raised questions regarding the larger strategic implications of the proposal. Was it enough? Would it do any good? What were the prospects of success? How should the U.S. approach the burgeoning Vietnam military problem? The Chairman promised that a comprehensive reexamination would be undertaken expressly appraising these long-term aspects and an appropriate response submitted soon. Meanwhile, he urged upon the SecDef that every effort be made to seek a favorable, timely decision on the current JCS proposal at hand.

¹JCSM 515-65 for SecDef, 2 Jul 65, TS.

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(S) Over the succeeding few days the 2 July JCS proposal for a 34-battalion U.S. force was discussed by the SecDef and SecState and taken up with key members of the Presidential staff. No formal disposition was made and no decision was forthcoming. Instead, the matter was again taken under advisement. Indications were that the President was reluctant to approve categorically an entire program package of such size but was prepared to consider favorably those specific force deployments that came up which could be cogently justified as absolutely essential at the time. The sense of the White House reception of the proposed program was conveyed to the JCS, and at their meeting with the SecDef on 7 July the SecDef requested further study and additional information on the requirements.¹

(S) Nevertheless, acceptance of the inevitability of a force buildup to the level proposed by the JCS by now obtained generally within the Washington decision-making community. Consistent intelligence estimates from various sources corroborated that developments in the Vietnam situation were in serious straits and that conditions would probably further deteriorate before the trend could be checked, let alone reversed. The U.S. response accordingly would have to be cast in longer range terms and on a larger scale than the relatively impromptu reactions that hitherto characterized the measures taken in the course of meeting successive exigencies of the war. In effect, the principle of eventual commitment on the order of 44 U.S. Allied battalions was a foregone conclusion. Only the specific details were not yet agreed to and formally adopted. Some Administration officials were even prepared to consider augmenting such a commitment if required.

(U) On 9 July the President disclosed in a news conference that the U.S. was prepared to send additional troops to South Vietnam to exceed the previously announced goal of 75,000.

¹Interview No. 01, S; Talking Paper for JCS, J-3 TP 37-65, 7 July 65, S.

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(S) After a long transitional phase, a watershed in the Vietnam war had emerged. Not only had the 3-division goal of March been reached, it had been passed. A 44-battalion force, which now seemed likely, was equivalent to 5 divisions. By virtue of its sheer magnitude this represented a fundamental change in kind. The earlier tentativeness that marked U.S. involvement had now given way to a tacit full commitment, one for all practical purposes henceforth precluding disengagement. No longer could the U.S. conceive of its role as providing indirect military support and assistance. Unequivocally it was already a major belligerent.

(S) As though to underscore the end of an era, on 8 July the White House announced that General Taylor would step down as Ambassador to Vietnam, to be replaced by Henry Cabot Lodge. Throughout the year of his incumbency in the post, Ambassador Taylor had been one of the chief opponents of large-scale involvement in the ground war. He had counseled against each of the deployment proposals as too much too fast, and advocated greater reliance on the South Vietnamese to fight their own war themselves. Events had long overtaken the policy posture he espoused. Before the month was out, on 30 July, he left Saigon.

(TS) Though the 44-battalion program recommendation submitted by the JCS on 2 July (JCSM 515-65) was not then adopted in its entirety, one positive direct outcome was to speed up final approval for deploying a major part of it, the long-proposed U.S. Army Airmobile Division. On 15 July the Deputy Secretary of Defense formally advised the CJCS that the alerting, scheduling of transportation, and ordering of ships for moving the Airmobile Division and its associated combat and logistic support units to Vietnam had been authorized.¹

(S) As for the other additional forces provided for in JCSM 515-65, final decision approving the deployments was not yet forthcoming

¹ Memo DepSecDef to CJCS, 15 July, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

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pending a basic review of the whole situation and a determination of what the indicated course in response to it should be. In other words, the rationale for intensifying U.S. military involvement had to be reexamined, then the dimensions of force requirements addressed, in that order, before actual deployments on the substantial scale contemplated could be authorized.

(S) Just a day earlier, on 14 July, the promised overall strategic review appraising the Vietnam situation, which the Secretary of Defense had requested of the CJCS on 2 July, was completed. It had been prepared on an urgent basis, in response to an oral directive of the CJCS, by an ad hoc staff group working under the supervision of the Office of the CJCS. Included in the group was representation from the Chairman's Office, the Chairman's Special Studies Group in J-5, DIA, J-3, and the Joint War Games Agency. Their task, as laid down by the Secretary of Defense, was to assess what assurance the U.S. could have of winning the war in South Vietnam "if we do everything we can".

(S) The resulting "concept and appraisal", as it was called, had concluded that the U.S. could win in South Vietnam provided there were a substantial step up in scale, scope, and effectiveness of U.S./SVN operations based on superior military force sufficient to gain and keep the initiative. Seen as an essential prerequisite was a heavy preponderance of friendly over enemy troops in country. Quantitatively, it was determined, this should be a 44-battalion U.S./Allied force, with parallel increase in air support. A force of such size was considered adequate under present circumstances to establish the required force ratio superiority and be capable of turning the tide, but later additional forces, amounting anywhere from 7 to as many as 35 more maneuver battalions (and proportionately more air and other support), might prove necessary before final victory was achieved.¹

¹Report of Ad Hoc Study Group to CJCS, 14 July 1965, ~~TOP SECRET~~, JCS 2343/630, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

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(TS) Immediately upon receipt of the above special assessment, the CJCS forwarded it to the JCS and simultaneously to the Secretary of Defense.¹ It was not formally acted upon by the JCS themselves, in the sense of a decision approving it, nor did it elicit any formal direct response from the Secretary of Defense. It later served, however, as both a stimulus and vehicle for eventually formalizing an institutional JCS concept for the future conduct of the war.²

(TS) In sum, the special concept and appraisal that had been produced was a recapitulation and further justification of the JCS position as it had evolved so far. It reiterated and reconfirmed what the JCS had been proposing up to that point. The stated force level requirements were identical with those presented in the latest JCS deployment recommendation submitted to the Secretary of Defense on 2 July, the day the Secretary of Defense originally asked the CJCS for a comprehensive strategic reexamination of Vietnam prospects and needs.

(TS) On 16 July the Dep SecDef (in the absence of the SecDef who was on his way to visit Vietnam) met three times with the President and his White House advisors to address the JCS 44-battalion program proposal that had been forwarded as a recommendation by the SecDef. After much weighing of the issues and implications for and against such a commitment, the upshot was a somewhat qualified, but essentially favorable, decision to approve this course of action. The decision rendered apparently was not a crisp one, in form or purport, but rather contained overtones of reservation. As reported the next day (17 July) to the SecDef in Saigon by special message, the Dep SecDef in apprising him of what had transpired employed the phrasing, "...it is the President's current intention to proceed with the 34 U.S. battalion plan."³ Nonetheless, the decision was immediately

¹CM-744-65 for JCS, 14 July 1965, ~~TOP SECRET~~; CM-745-65 for Secretary of Defense, 14 July 1965, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

²JCS 2343/646 (no "decision on" and withdrawn), ~~TOP SECRET~~.

³Mag, Vance to SecDef McNamara, Saigon, "Literally Eyes Only", 172042Z Jul 65, TS.

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interpreted as a clear green light, and, as will be seen shortly, the SecDef and the military establishment lost no time in following it up accordingly. Over the next few days not only did the explicit implementing actions presuming unconditional approval of a full 44-battalion commitment crystallize, but momentum was generated for a scale of commitment going well beyond that decision.

(C) Actual troop movements of individual units whose deployment had been authorized were meanwhile being carried out with alacrity. At the end of July the total U.S. in-country strength had reached approximately 81,500, up almost 58,000 from the first of the year.

(C) Soon, in high-level conferences in Saigon, Honolulu, and Washington over the next few months, the force ceiling would again be progressively raised much further, and the new phase of the war begin to take form. With respect to deployments, the U.S. buildup was entering the steep straight-legged portion of the J-curve. A cumulative series of proposed program increases falling one on top of another was to create a powerful spiraling effect inexorably pushing the commitment upward, until the very momentum of escalation seemed to be a force in itself. Within a year both the in-country strength and the firm planning commitments for additional programmed deployments would far exceed anything imagined in the first half of 1965.

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CHAPTER IV

PHASE I DEPLOYMENT PROGRAMS

THE SECDEF JULY VISIT TO VIETNAM

(TS) Even before the ad hoc concept study was completed, the SecDef had already decided on paying a personal visit to Vietnam in order to observe conditions at first hand and to evaluate requirements at the source.¹ Arriving on 16 July and staying through the 20th, he was accompanied by many of the high-level Washington principals concerned. Included in his party were the Asst SecDef (ISA), the CJCS, Asst to CJCS, Dep Asst SecState for Far Eastern Affairs, the new Ambassador-designate to Vietnam, and a special assistant from the White House staff. Among local participants in the series of meetings were, besides COMUSMACV and his staff, the Ambassador, the Deputy Ambassador, and key members of the U.S. mission. It was while he was there that the SecDef received word of the Presidential decision on the 44-battalion proposal.

(TS) Extensive briefings oriented to a list of 27 basic questions submitted in advance by the SecDef had been prepared.² In the course of addressing each of them the MACV briefers presented a cogent case⁼ justifying the need for, and outlining a concept for employing, greatly increased forces in South Vietnam. The situation was described as having reached a critical juncture and a buildup was essential. The main thrust of the briefings was that the presently recommended 44-battalion U.S./Allied force, operating from secure bases, was imperative over the immediate short-term if a still viable strategic position were to be preserved. Identified as Phase I, this first stage of the buildup was designed to reverse the trend of VC military gains and

¹Msg SecDef to COMUSMACV DEF 5319 072352Z, July 65, ~~TOP SECRET/LIMDIS~~.

²Memo SecDef for COMUSMACV, 14 July 65, ~~TOP SECRET/LIMDIS~~.

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provide a limited offensive/reaction strike capability. Phase I would then have to be followed by a second incremental increase of forces on the order of an additional 24 maneuver battalions. This stage of the buildup, referred to as Phase II, was designed to provide a capability to regain the initiative in launching offensive actions to expand areas of pacification. Later, it was possible that additional battalions beyond the Phase II increases would be required if there were continued substantial buildup of VC strength.¹

(PS) Phase I requirements were divided into a balanced program package. In addition to validating the size of the basic ground combat force as 44 maneuver battalions, ancillary forces were to be increased so as to reach the following levels: 20 USAF squadrons (TFS, recce, and support), 6 USMC tactical air squadrons, 22 artillery battalions, 4 HAWK battalions, 13 Engineer Battalions, 20 U.S. Army helicopter companies, 7 USMC helicopter squadrons, 3 helicopter service support units, and associated logistic forces. Together these requirements if met would amount to a total U.S./Allied force level of 176,162, all to be in-country by the end of calendar year 1965. The Phase I buildup represented the estimated minimum strength deemed necessary to stem the current losing trend of the war. Generally it corroborated the last formal deployment program recommended by the JCS on 2 July, but varied in certain types of units and strength figures.

(TS) In response to the SecDef's questions as to what additional forces would probably be required in 1966 to gain U.S. objectives, COMUSMACV outlined a need for some estimated 95,000 more personnel to augment Phase I forces. This follow-on increment, referred to as Phase II of the buildup, would be deployed in calendar year 1966. The increases specifically identified for Phase II were: 24 more maneuver battalions, 7 more tactical fighter squadrons, 2 transport squadrons, 3 HAWK battalions, 8 Engineer battalions, 12 Army helicopter companies, 6 USMC helicopter squadrons, and an appropriate proportion of new supporting troops. These Phase II deployments when completed

¹Memo for Record C/S USMACV, 24 July 1965, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

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would provide, with the existing Phase I forces, for a 68-maneuver battalion U.S./Allied force, bringing the grand total U.S./Allied in-country strength to 270,972.¹

(TS) The expository development of requirements and rationale in the briefings had a telling effect. The SecDef, apparently thoroughly convinced, then asked COMUSMACV, as an ad hoc request, what else he might need or want "to facilitate and accelerate accomplishment of the MACV mission". Whereupon the MACV staff, having no time to coordinate with CINCPAC (or JCS), quickly improvised a response more or less on the spur of the moment, which was given to the SecDef on the last day of his visit just prior to his departure. Identified in its title as a "shopping list", the impromptu reply that had been prepared was a wide-ranging catchall containing a detailed but perforce incomplete tabulation of assorted "requirements", some of which pertained to forces and materiel and others to procedural and administrative matters, under the following headings: Personnel, Transportation, Equipment, Construction, Units, Procedures/Funds, and Communications/Systems. Inevitably a few items were premature expressions of desiderata not subjected to thorough enough staff processing and review. Moreover, they were not all completely consistent with what had been presented to the SecDef in the main briefings. However, those items involving force increases, by virtue of having been thus conveyed directly to the SecDef at his request, effectively had the full impact of formal validated requirements in the most literal sense.

(TS) Expressly asked for in the Shopping List were three new categories of Phase I forces that together proved to be substantial. First, it was proposed that those elements of the 1st Special Forces Group on TDY be changed to permanent status. Then, 23 new counter-intelligence teams were requested. The largest requirement by far was for in-place U.S. ground combat forces for external tactical defense of each USAF air base and other critical U.S. military sites

¹ Hq USMACV Briefing Book for SecDef and Party, 20 July 65, ~~TOP SECRET~~, JCS 2343/673, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

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(communication installations, radar, etc.). The number of current and planned air bases needing such defense forces in the Phase I time frame was 9, while the total number of the other critical sites was as yet undetermined. Also desired was greatly accelerated deployment of most of the air units of both Phase I and Phase II of the buildup.

(S) Considerable emphasis was given in the Shopping List to stream-lining procedures and channels for effecting changes in force structure. MACV wanted the whole process speeded up so that the respective personnel and equipment resources would arrive in South Vietnam within 45 days of COMUSMACV's submission of a given requirement. To this end, it was recommended that the detailed reviewing of Service manpower requirements at intermediate headquarters be eliminated. Also proposed was increasing the USAF manpower ceiling to provide a reserved block of spaces specifically earmarked for meeting SEA requirements against which MACV could draw.¹

(S) The additional force requirements stated in the Shopping List differed appreciably from previous recommendations made to the JCS, or for that matter, from those just made directly to the SecDef only two days before. As it turned out when later refined and staffed, the discrepancy came to something on the order of 20,000 more forces over and above the earlier stated goals of Phase I proper.

(S) The consequences of the Shopping List episode were to inject added confusion into the entire effort to arrive at some commonly agreed determination of exact force requirements. The confusion was further exacerbated by a steady stream of independent parallel submissions of new ad hoc requirements coming in piecemeal. For example, as early as 19 July, while the SecDef briefings were still underway in Saigon, the JCS issued a third corrigendum amending their 2 July program proposal. It was an updating of the program reflecting adjustments accumulated up to that time (since the 2nd

¹ Memo COMUSMACV for SecDef, MACJ00, 20 July 65, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

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corrigendum), which had raised the total strength figure to over 180,000 (vice the original JCS recommendation of 175,000) and called for an additional 6 to 9 tactical fighter squadrons to be deployed when airfields were available to receive them.¹ Then, in the next several days immediately following the Saigon briefings, additional requirement submissions came in individually from COMUSMACV changing strength totals upwards and adding new units not previously recommended to JCS nor included in the MACV Shopping List.²

(S) Meeting with the SecDef on 25 July, the JCS took up the matter of the additional military requirements that the SecDef had brought back with him. They addressed both the Shopping List increases and those flowing from the briefings given to the SecDef, as well as the other increases that had come in through formal channels in the interim. The SecDef desired an updated JCS program to reflect the new requirement. The JCS agreed so to direct the Joint Staff. At the same time, in recognition of the confused state of requirements generally, and particularly the anomaly of the 20,000 in the Shopping List, they decided on convening another planning conference in Honolulu as soon as arrangements could be made. The objective was to reconcile differences and develop a coordinated program for at least the Phase I deployments, namely, those forces required "to stem the tide in Vietnam".³

THE SECDEF JULY PLAN AND THE JULY PRESIDENTIAL DECISION

(S) The SecDef meanwhile, after consulting with key members of the White House Staff and senior State Department officials, reported to the President the results of his trip and the recommended course of action much as laid out by COMUSMACV. He succeeded in convincing him there was no alternative but a substantial rapid buildup in South Vietnam, giving an indication of the magnitude of forces required. An OSD program, reflecting the JCS recommendations of 2 July but

¹Third Corrigendum, N/H JCS 2343/602-3, 19 July 65, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

²Msgs COMUSMACV to CINCPAC and JCS 220625Z, July 65 and 250245Z, July 65, both ~~TOP SECRET~~.

³JCS 2343/602-6, ~~TOP SECRET~~; Interviews No. 01B and No. 08, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

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significantly modified and partly taking into account the Shopping List, was prepared and submitted to the President.¹ Known as the SecDef "July Plan", it was essentially a projection of deployment assumptions regarding force levels for Southeast Asia and was oriented to budgetary and appropriations purposes. It provided for 34 U.S. maneuver battalions, for a total of 186,700 U.S. personnel, by the end of 1965, with only a slight rise thereafter. Though it was adopted and governing for national fiscal planning, a copy of the July Plan was never furnished to the JCS.¹

(4S) As for authority to implement actual deployments themselves, again only part of the stated force goal was approved. The President, upon consulting with his advisers, decided to make a larger force commitment more or less on the order requested but not in one fell swoop. Not even for Phase I. The buildup would be kept open-ended and executed in installments as circumstances dictated. For the time being, approval was therefore granted for a minimum force increase considered adequate to forestall defeat now and preserve the option of future increases if and as deemed necessary or advisable. On 28 July, in a nationally televised news conference, the President announced that the number of U.S. troops in South Vietnam would be increased immediately by 50,000 more troops. This would raise U.S. strength from the previously announced goal of 75,000 to 125,000 men, the new level to be achieved by 1 September. Later more troops would probably be sent. He stated that a call-up of the reserves would not be necessary, but revealed that the draft would be doubled, bringing the rate to 35,000 a month.²

(4S) Things now began to move swiftly. That same night the JCS called for the convening of the deployment coordination conference to be held at CINCPAC Hq in Honolulu, setting the date for 3-5 August. The conference would deal with Phase I requirements only.³

¹The substance of the SecDef July Plan was later revealed in connection with the SecDef December Plan - see JCS 2458/42-12, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

²Interview No. 11, TOP SECRET; New York Times, 29 July 65.

³Msg JCS 6977 to CINCPAC et al 290056Z, July 65, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

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(TS) Also on the heels of the President's decision, on 29 July the JCS met to review and pass on the updated program requested by SecDef that was to take into account the MACV Shopping List and subsequent increases. The CSAF had serious reservations but was prevailed upon to agree to the program as a tentative guide for planning purposes. In effect, it was only a general outline proposal, and an interim one at that, pending the outcome of the Honolulu coordination conference about to get underway that would fix and define requirements and determine how they were to be met. It was decided so to forward the program to the SecDef without giving it formal JCS approval, and it was transmitted 30 July.¹ For Phase I, the proposed JCS program called for a 44 battalion force (34 U.S. and 10 Allied) to be deployed in-country by 31 December 1965, plus 23 tactical fighter squadrons and 53-1/3 helicopter companies/squadrons. With associated combat support, service support, and logistics forces, Phase I strength totals would be 195,887 U.S. and 22,250 Allied, for a grand total of 218,137 U.S./Allied personnel. For Phase II, the JCS projection was for bringing the level up, by April 1966, to a 71-battalion force (61 U.S. and 10 Allied) and raising the number of TFSs to 30 and helicopter companies/squadrons to 74-1/3. This was 3 maneuver battalions more than the 68 cited in the MACV briefings to the SecDef. All told, counting support forces, Phase II strength totals would reach 300,599 U.S. and 22,250 Allied, making a grand total of 322,849 U.S./Allied personnel in-country, most of whom would be deployed within a period of the next 9 months.² These figures over the next few days were adjusted downward slightly through minor revisions then readjusted back again. The whole JCS interim program proposal, however, was soon to be superseded by more definitive recommendations growing out of the CINCPAC coordination conference.³

¹JCS 2343/602-6, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

²JCSM 590-65 to SecDef 30 July 65, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

³Memo SM-714-65 for OSD et al 31 July 65, ~~TOP SECRET~~; Memo SM-729-65 for OSD et al 4 August 65, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

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(TS) In further implementation of the Presidential decision, on 31 July the remaining 6 battalions of the 1st Infantry Division were alerted for deployment to South Vietnam in October. Six artillery battalions and two HAWK battalions received movement orders the same day.¹ As July came to a close there were 80,079 U.S. military in country, with 17 maneuver battalion equivalents. Additional troops enroute or approved for deployment were 54,316. Total in-country, enroute, and approved U.S. strength came to 134,395 personnel, which would provide for fielding a 28-battalion tactical ground combat force.²

THE AUGUST CINCPAC DEPLOYMENT COORDINATION
CONFERENCE FOR PHASE I

(TS) The Honolulu conference, held at PACOM Hq on 3-5 August as scheduled, devoted itself to planning the Phase I deployments, using the JCS interim program proposal of 30 July as guidance and general framework. The purpose was to refine details and devise a comprehensive coordinated program for deploying specific units in time to meet Phase I force level objectives. Phase II was outside the terms of reference and would be treated separately at some later date. Participating in the conference were representatives of the following: Joint Staff, military Services, OSD, CINCPAC, PACOM service components, CINCSSTRIKE, STRICOM service components, MATS, MSTTS, MTMTS, COMUSMACV, MACV service components, and COMUSKOREA.

(TS) Emerging from the conference was an integrated program reflecting agreements reached among the represented agencies and command. The product provided for a basic ground combat force of 44-manuever battalion (34 U.S. and 10 Allied) to be in-country by 31 December 1965, and 22 fighter squadrons, 54-1/3 helicopter companies/squadrons, and associated combat support, service support, and logistics units, though not all of the latter could be deployed by year's end but some would have to arrive in 1966. In the process of fleshing out a balanced

¹Hq USMACV Command History 1965 op.cit., ~~TOP SECRET~~.

²CINCPAC Command History 1965 op.cit., ~~TOP SECRET~~.

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deployment program, force totals climbed considerably beyond those contemplated in the JCS proposal. It now called for the U.S. strength figure in-country to be 206,906 personnel, plus 21,104 Allied (down slightly), for a grand total U.S./Allied Phase I force of 228,010 deployed in South Vietnam. Most of it was intended to be in place by the end of 1965.

(TS) Additional related forces were also to be deployed in connection with the primary Phase I deployments, both to South Vietnam itself and to other locations in WESTPAC, including a brigade force of 10,000 for Thailand. These together come to another 50,961 U.S. personnel. The total Phase I buildup would thus involve well over a quarter million men.¹

(TS) Accompanying the recommended Phase I program was a statement of three critical problem areas bearing upon the program produced, which had been identified as a result of the conference. First was decision timeliness - in order to meet target deployment dates for those units ready to move, a decision was needed no later than 15 August. Secondly, the program was contingent upon the Republic of Korea Government granting approval for the ROK division force, which also affected U.S. supporting elements earmarked for it. Finally, it was pointed out that the limited capacity of the Port of Saigon, particularly if the Saigon River were obstructed, might cause serious delays for the 1st Infantry Division force.²

DEVELOPING AN UPDATED PHASE I PROGRAM

(TS) The Joint Staff set to work processing the conference's recommended program in coordination with the Services and OSD staff. The SecDef and the White House had been kept currently apprised of the program underway, and in discussions of its implications Presidential approval was obtained for a substantial increase in the size of the

¹ Letter CINCPAC to JCS Ser 000259 6 August 65, ~~TOP SECRET~~; JCS 2343/655, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

² Ibid, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

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U.S. armed forces. On 4 August, the President asked Congress for \$1.7 billion in extra defense appropriations for strengthening U.S. military power in Vietnam. The same day the SecDef, in supporting testimony before the Senate Subcommittee on Department of Defense Appropriations, revealed that, because of Vietnam requirements, it was planned to raise the armed forces manpower ceiling by 340,000, bringing the total for all Services to 2,980,000. The Army would have the largest expansion and be brought to a strength of 1,188,000 troops.¹

(PS) On 20 August the JCS met, with the SecDef attending part of the session, to consider the Phase I deployment program developed at the Honolulu coordination conference. They decided to accept the overall program and approved most of it as submitted. Among the exceptions was []

[] and to defer for further study some of the support units for Vietnam that might not be available within the Phase I time frame. At the same time, however, they agreed to incorporate in the updated JCS program subsequent individual unit additions that had been generated separately since the conference, including a few increases added by the Joint Staff incidentally in the course of staffing the matter fully for the JCS. As a result the Phase I total that the JCS would recommend now came to 210,000 U.S. personnel in South Vietnam. The SecDef was in accord and indicated he would recommend approval when the JCS program was forwarded to him.²

(PS) The question now was would the President, in view of his past caution and reluctance, look with favor upon expanding the U.S. military commitment in Vietnam by such an order of magnitude. There were sensitive policy implications to be considered that might well be overriding. He probably could be expected to approve at least part

¹ New York Times, 4 August 65.

² JCS 2343/655-2, ~~TOP SECRET~~; Interview No. 08, ~~TOP SECRET~~, NMCC EA Records, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

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of the deployments initially, but what if he failed to authorize all of the program? Accordingly, immediately following the JCS meeting of 20 August, the SecDef instructed the Asst SecDef (ISA) to look into the manpower authorization problem and determine both the present status of the buildup currently underway and the impact of the new Phase I program.

(PS) Late the same day (20 August) the Asst SecDef (ISA) reported to the SecDef that the deployment account was already overdrawn. Until the President made further decisions, there was a firm ceiling of 125,000 on the total U.S. personnel authorized to be in or moving to Vietnam. If the President decided to commit all of the forces in the Phase I program, the resulting authorized U.S. strength in Vietnam would come to 210,000. If not, or to the degree it fell short of this, there would have to be radical readjustments not only in the planned Phase I program but also in deployments already in the process of being implemented. Troop movements currently directed by the JCS already exceeded the presently authorized ceiling of 125,000, for they alone would bring the in-country total to 151,883. To account for the discrepancy, it was explained that the excess represented normal administrative necessities because of lead times required for transportation arrangements, funding, and other preparatory actions. Actually more than this overage, i.e., 27,155 troops, were still at home stations in CONUS as of the end of August, and, it was pointed out, could be halted in time should the President decide not to raise the present 125,000 limit. In view of the unknowns involved and in the interests of better control, he assured the SecDef that henceforth, on instructions of the Deputy SecDef, three sets of dates were being maintained in connection with all future scheduled deployments:

- 1) date each unit is alerted for movement, 2) date transportation is contracted for, and 3) date for final authorization for the unit actually to deploy.¹

¹ Memo Asst SecDef (ISA) for SecDef 20 August 65, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

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(TS) Three days later, on 23 August, the JCS forwarded their new program to the SecDef as agreed to on 20 August. It was identified as a refined program that updated and added to the earlier JCS program forwarded via JCSM 515-65 on 2 July. As the current JCS-approved deployment program for the Phase I buildup, they recommended that the force deployments laid out in it be authorized. It provided for the 34 U.S. maneuver battalion force (plus 10 Allied battalions) for a total U.S. in-country strength of 210,175 in Vietnam. In addition, 40,676 more U.S. personnel were to be deployed to WESTPAC and other Southeast Asia areas.¹

APPROVAL OF THE PHASE I PROGRAM

(TS) The SecDef approved the JCS Phase I program without change, and a week later, after preliminary discussions with White House assistants, sent it with his indorsement to the President. He recommended that deployment of an additional increment of forces amounting to 85,000 more troops as requested by COMUSMACV and concurred in by JCS, be accordingly authorized. This required a proportionate raising of the ceiling on U.S. forces in South Vietnam from the current level of 125,000 (28 U.S. maneuver battalions), previously announced by the President on 28 July, to a new level of 210,000 (34 U.S. maneuver battalions). The Sec Def also recommended that no announcement be made of the decision to deploy these additional U.S. forces.²

(TS) Events in South Vietnam had created a climate conducive to favorable consideration of additional deployments. Through the month of August U.S. ground forces, both Army and Marines, progressively became involved directly in tactical combat operations against the VC. The frequency and scale of engagements increased and U.S. troops began to initiate active search and destroy offensives. At the same time U.S. bases and installations were being more subjected to enemy attack.³

¹JCSM-643-65 for SecDef 23 August 65, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

²Memo SecDef for the President 1 September 65, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

³NMCC EA Records, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

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(TS) The President, taking the Phase I recommendations under advisement, did not respond until 7 September, when he informally conveyed what was by then his expected decision to approve only part of the proposed program. He agreed to an increase of only 50,000 more U.S. troops for the time being, thus setting the authorized ceiling on U.S. strength in Vietnam at 175,000 men. This was considerably less than what had been asked for even in the SecDef July Plan. The added increment hardly accommodated much more than the total commitment already in-country, in the pipeline, or in some preparatory stage for movement.

(TS) Later in the month the SecDef tried again. By mid September the follow-on phase to the Phase I program itself was well along in development and the need for at least the full Phase I authorization was pressing if the first stage of the buildup were to be achieved. On 21 September the SecDef formally reopened the issue of Vietnam strength ceilings with respect to the immediate short-term requirements of implementing the remaining deployments planned or in process. He recommended "at the present time" that the President authorize movement of an additional 35,000 U.S. military personnel to South Vietnam above the latest Presidentially authorized figure of 175,000, thus bringing the U.S. in-country total to 210,000. The SecDef also advised the President that yet other U.S. forces in addition to the 210,000 would probably be needed later.¹

(S) A decision, even informal, was not forthcoming on this last Phase I increment until October. It was authorized indirectly in the course of deliberations attending far larger deployment program proposals that had overtaken it in the interim. No evidence of an explicit ruling being formally rendered by the President has been found. Apparently thereafter Presidential action regarding force levels and authorization of deployments was handled informally on an interpersonal basis between himself and key principals involved.

¹ Memo SecDef for the President 21 September 65, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

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(C) The Phase I program itself was by no means yet in final form. This latest refined, updated version would still grow further, even as the program for the succeeding phase was being developed.

A STRATEGIC CONCEPT FOR DEPLOYMENTS

(C) Up to now the whole U.S. deployments approach was essentially without system. For the first six-month period since the buildup got underway the rapidly growing U.S. military commitment was the result of a series of ad hoc expedients in reaction to pressing operational demands of the moment. Whether field requirements or national decision action related to them, each was treated individually, case by case, as it came up. Indeed, in due course a pattern had eventually emerged, one that was at least indicative of gross direction, but it was less a predetermined product than a post facto effect. The original introduction of ground combat units, the subsequent increases in numbers of troops in country, and the projected deployment programs to commit yet more forces all, so far, lacked policy context or strategic perspective. No long-range basic plan existed even in outline to provide a coherent rationale, a guide, and a frame of reference for deployments. What was needed, if perhaps belatedly, was the formulation of a concept of the U.S. military response in Vietnam to serve as a master plan for the buildup.

(TS) It was largely at the insistence of the CSAF that an attempt was made to develop a concept as such. From the very beginning the Air Force position had been one of opposing U.S. involvement in any major land war on the Asian mainland, and as that possibility began to materialize in the successive deployments to South Vietnam, the CSAF became progressively more and more apprehensive as to where it would all lead to. Ratification of the relatively massive Phase I force goals, and the imminent likelihood that they would expand to unknown proportions, prompted him to press the JCS once more for a thorough stocktaking with a view to devising a methodical comprehensive approach to the future strategic conduct of the war. At various JCS

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meetings in July and through the month of August, as well as in informal discussions and in memoranda, he advocated a broad agenda of basic issues to be addressed and resolved. He urged first a reappraisal of the military situation in Vietnam, a determination of U.S. objectives in the circumstances, and identification of military tasks to be performed to attain them; then, after prescribing appropriate courses of action to carry out the tasks, a reassessment of force requirements accordingly.¹ The compelling logic of the proposal, particularly at this late juncture, soon won support. But it was some time before an approved JCS concept for Vietnam was set forth.

(S) An incipient conceptual scheme had been germinating for some time. Its roots go back to the original enclave idea first described by COMUSMACV to the CSA on his fact-finding trip to Vietnam in March, parts of which were subsequently abandoned and the rest modified in practice or overtaken by events. Nevertheless, in greatly altered form it proved to be roughly analogous to, or at least coincided with, much of what eventually became Phase I. And implied in the term Phase I itself was the promise of one or more other phases to follow. In fact an even more elaborate framework along similar lines, though expanded to four phases, had been outlined in the CINCPAC deployment planning conference of 8-10 April. The same broad approach, but simplified to two phases, was reiterated in the special strategic assessment prepared at the request of the CJCS by the Ad Hoc Study Group on 14 July. A two-phase concept and corresponding buildup were also described in the MACV briefings presented to the SecDef during his July visit to Vietnam.

(S) In early August, at the conclusion of the Honolulu deployment planning conference for Phase I, CINCPAC initiated preparatory planning to address follow-on requirements for the next stage. In connection with this planning, consideration had to be given to elemental assumptions as a reference base, including charting a

¹JCS 2343/646, ~~TOP SECRET~~; Van Staaveren op.cit., ~~TOP SECRET~~.

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hypothetical sequence of expected progress in the war. At that time the phase concept crystallized and became firmly established. Phase I was identified as the period from the present up to 31 December 1965 in which to stop losing the war, with goals limited to the essentially defensive purpose of halting the VC offensive and stemming the tide. Phase II was defined as the next stage, from 1 January to 30 June 1966, in which U.S./SVN forces would "resume" the offensive and seize the initiative. An indefinite Phase III, from 1 July 1966 on, was also postulated, in which the VC would be "defeated" and the war finally "won". But the latter term soon died out and this theoretical terminal phase was presumably absorbed as an extension of Phase II.¹ At this point in time it was patently in the realm of academic abstraction anyway. Phase I embraced the concrete realities.

(S) In short, by early August there already existed a more or less common body of general consensus regarding the broad outlines of how the war was to be prosecuted, which was, moreover, well on the way to becoming explicit and concrete de facto. But none of this was yet cast in a truly national perspective or comprehensively developed into a coherent whole, nor had it been promulgated officially.

(TS) The bringing together of these general understandings in order to produce a single integrated national concept was not easily achieved. When reduced to specific terms and rendered formally in what purported to be an official statement of the JCS position, there proved to be differences of interpretation about implications, no little divergence as to priorities and relative emphasis, and a measure of controversy on a few basic substantive matters. The most serious issues revolved around proper scope, perspective, and level of detail. The special 14 July report prepared by the Ad Hoc Study Group had been referred by the JCS, at the urging of the CSAF, to the Joint Staff for a thorough reworking, on the grounds of its being partly overtaken by new factors emerging in the interim connected

¹CINCPAC Command History, 1965, op.cit., ~~TOP SECRET~~.

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with the recent SecDef's visit to Vietnam.. J-5 was assigned action and directed to develop an overall concept using it as a basis but taking into account the mass of relevant information generated as a result of the SecDef's trip. Several Joint Staff reports to the JCS dealing with that information were currently being circulated.¹

(To) When the first version was deliberated by the JCS on 6 August, the CSAF again had reservations, to the point of being in nonconcurrence until prevailed upon to accept it as a tentative and conditional draft statement. Among his objections was that not enough weight and attention were given to the role of North Vietnam in the war in South Vietnam. Another was that CINCPAC should have an opportunity to review it in light of just having completed the Honolulu deployment planning conference for Phase I. The proposed JCS concept was so approved, subject to incorporation of the CSAF-suggested changes regarding the DRV problem and coordination with CINCPAC. That same day the JCS forwarded the draft concept to CINCPAC and requested his views, comments, and recommendations.²

(TS) CINCPAC's reply on 18 August indicated general agreement, with only minor exceptions.³ J-5 meanwhile was preparing a second, revised version, which itself went through several draft stages before it was finally presented to the JCS for decision. Since there were still serious unresolved issues outstanding, it represented a compromise. In their meeting of 25 August, the JCS decided to confine their concept statement to a broad strategic overview and not try to spell out the concrete details of how the concept should be realized in practice. This, it was agreed, was a prerogative and responsibility best left to the tactical commanders concerned. Accordingly, they directed that CINCPAC be requested to furnish the basic undertakings, operational concept, courses of action, and force requirements necessary to carry out the JCS concept for Vietnam. A

¹JCS 2343/634, 635, 636, 637 (all ~~TOP SECRET~~).

²JCS 2343/646, ~~TOP SECRET~~; Msg JCS 7724 to CINCPAC 061804Z, August 1965, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

³Msg CINCPAC 180120Z, August 1965 to JCS, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

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copy of the final version of the concept automatically went to CINCPAC. Instructions to develop the details were issued that same evening.¹

(TS) CINCPAC in turn directed COMUSMACV on 29 August to develop a concept of operations, tasks, courses of action, and force requirements and their phasing for the next stage of the war, suggesting it be done during the Saigon conference scheduled for early September.² COMUSMACV, however, had been listed as an information addressee on the JCS message and anticipated the CINCPAC directive. The very next day (30 August), therefore, he was able to respond in a letter to CINCPAC and JCS publishing his concept of operations for South Vietnam, including an outline of objectives, tasks, and time frames to accomplish the various goals. The relative level of detail was consistent with and easily subsumed under the broad sweep of the JCS concept. Force requirements to support the MACV concept would be determined later at the Saigon conference shortly to get underway.³

(TS) Meanwhile, the final JCS-approved "Concept for Vietnam" was promulgated and forwarded to the SecDef on 27 August. In it the JCS set forth their strategic concept for the future conduct of the war in Vietnam, stating that their concept provided a basis for terminating the war under conditions satisfactory to the U.S. and the Government of Vietnam. Citing the recent adverse developments in the military situation, they submitted that the war in Vietnam "is the single most critical international problem facing the U.S. today, and it portends the most serious immediate threat to continued U.S. world leadership and national security". The present situation was characterized as having deteriorated to the point where U.S. national objectives were endangered. These U.S. objectives in Vietnam were identified as continuing to be those laid down in NSAM 288 of 17 March 1964, namely "a stable and independent non-communist government". To

¹JCS 2343/646-1 (~~TOP SECRET~~); Msg JCS 9143 to CINCPAC Info COMUSMACV 252211Z August 1965 (~~TOP SECRET~~).

²Msg CINCPAC 290143Z August 65 to COMUSMACV (~~TOP SECRET~~).

³Ltr COMUSMACV Ser 12311 to CINCPAC, JCS et al, 30 August 65 (~~TOP SECRET~~).

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achieve them, the following basic military tasks, of equal priority, were identified:

- a. Cause the DRV to cease its direction and support of the VC insurgency.
- b. Defeat the VC and extend GVN control over all of South Vietnam.
- c. Deter the ChiComs from direct intervention and to defeat such intervention if it occurs.

To fulfill these tasks, the corresponding requirements were:

- a. Stepped-up military pressure against DRV bases and LOCs.
- b. Superior military forces in South Vietnam to seize and hold the initiative.
- c. A U.S. force buildup in Thailand and WESTPAC to deter ChiCom aggression.

Further force requirements that the concept entailed would be forthcoming. They would be submitted later as they developed and were validated.¹

(S) The JCS concept for Vietnam had no discernible impact. A copy was sent by the Asst SecDef (ISA) on 8 September to the Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs.² It brought no formal acknowledgement or response. A copy was also provided to the SecState and similarly elicited no reaction. Other than the forwarding of the concept for information, no specific action was taken regarding it by the SecDef either. In his reply to the CJCS on 11 September, the SecDef took note of it to the extent of saying the JCS recommendations would be "considered" on an individual basis as appropriate in connection with continuing high-level discussions on Vietnam.³

(S) The Saigon force requirements conference was held from 1 through 10 September. Emerging from it was an identification of major

¹JCSM-652-65 for SecDef, 27 August 1965 (~~TOP SECRET~~).

²Memo I-36114/65 Asst SecDef (ISA) for Special Assistant to the President for NS Affairs, 8 September 1965 (~~TOP SECRET~~).

³Memo SecDef for CJCS, 11 September 1965 (~~SECRET~~).

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additional forces required for Phase II according to the concept of operations and tasks outlined earlier. Something on the order of about 100,000 more men, over and above Phase I forces, would be needed. These included two more U.S. Army infantry divisions, an armored cavalry regiment, another Field Force headquarters, another airborne battalion for the 173rd Airborne Brigade, the remainder of another Marine Amphibious Force (1st Marine Division - partly deployed in-country), additional USAF tactical fighter squadrons, and additional support forces numbering approximately 30,000. The results of the conference, spelling out requirements and their desired phasing, were conveyed to CINCPAC on 18 September.¹

STRATEGIC SIDE EFFECTS OF THE BUILDUP

(S) Before the CINCPAC Phase II requirements conference got underway, the larger problem of the drain on U.S. strategic reserves caused by the burgeoning demands of Southeast Asia began to create concern. Pressures that had been building up for some months as a result of meeting past deployment commitments were putting available resources progressively under severer strain and, without compensating replenishment, promised to get much worse. The already serious proportions of the problem required attention soon. The potentially grave consequences of further degradation of U.S. military posture, which now seemed imminent, were viewed with apprehension in many quarters. Some regarded the prospect as an unacceptable risk.

(TS) PACOM experience was indicative. CINCPAC had difficulty obtaining CONUS replacements for forces deployed to Vietnam in order to maintain minimal theater reserves. In August, for example, COMUSMACV had recommended having a CONUS airborne brigade force available in WESTPAC as a ready reaction force for emergencies in Vietnam. CINCPAC concurred and requested that such a tailored ground force to strengthen theater reserves be stationed in Okinawa ready for rapid deployment and combat operations as needed. The JCS, at their meeting of 3 September,

¹Ltr COMUSMACV Ser 12315 to CINCPAC, JCS, et al, 18 September 1965
(~~TOP SECRET~~).

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were in favor but had to decline the request because there were no forces to spare. Reasons cited for their decision were the reduced status of the CONUS strategic reserve level, present world-wide military commitments, the possibility of contingencies arising elsewhere, and the fact that considerable forces were already committed for deployment to WESTPAC in connection with the Phase I program.¹

(S) Each of the Services individually was experiencing similar difficulties in meeting on-going commitments and responsibilities from a fixed resource base while responding to the increasing Vietnam requirements. Sooner or later one or the other would have to give. The Air Force and Navy were particularly hard pressed.

(TS) By mid-September the state of affairs had reached a stage where the JCS were prompted to bring the matter formally before the national command authorities. On 24 September, in a memorandum to the SecDef, they went on record to explain how serious the situation was becoming and what actions were imperative if it were to be rectified.² The JCS advised that because of the effects of Southeast Asia deployments, and in view of projected additional deployments, the U.S. strategic reserves required to maintain the U.S. world-wide military posture were being depleted and had to be reconstituted. The magnitude of forces needed to restore the posture presented national problems that had to be addressed at once. The following policy measures were mandatory:

- a. Call-up of reserve units.
- b. Involuntary extension of terms of service.
- c. Increases in Service manpower ceilings.
- d. Expansion of the industrial base.

(TS) Specific major force increases that so far had been identified as necessary in connection with Phase I alone were:

¹Msg COMUSMACV 27226 to CINCPAC 032350Z August 1965 (~~TOP SECRET~~); Msg CINCPAC 112240Z August 1965 to JCS (~~TOP SECRET~~); JCS 2343/655-4 (~~TOP SECRET~~).

²JCS 2343/640-1 (~~TOP SECRET~~).

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- a. Activation of 7 Army Aviation Companies for deployment to SVN.
- b. Deployment of an additional CVS (the LEXINGTON) to SVN.
- c. Reactivation of one CVS from the Naval Reserve Fleet for the NATO CVS commitment.
- d. Reactivation of one cruiser from the Naval Reserve Fleet for SVN.
- e. Reactivation of 23 DDs from the Naval Reserve Fleet.
- f. Formation of two attack air wings (for LEXINGTON and INTREPID).
- g. Retention of three VP squadrons presently scheduled for deactivation.
- h. Formation of 10 new TFSs.
- i. Formation of three new Tactical Recce Squadrons.
- j. Formation of two more Troop Carrier Squadrons.
- k. Activation of one additional Marine Expeditionary Force.
- l. Appropriate augmentation of personnel, plus airlift, sealift, and support forces, to sustain total force posture with the above increases.

437 The JCS closed with the statement that a more detailed analysis of force requirements to maintain the strategic reserve level, reflecting additional deployments pending for Southeast Asia, would follow as soon as developed.¹

487 No immediate response was forthcoming. A month and a half later the JCS made another, more forceful, attempt to seek redress on even a larger scale in an effort to make up for attrition of strategic posture due to the Vietnam war. Again there was no urgent response and the situation indeed proved to get much worse under the added burden of Phase II. But only a small portion of the remedial action recommended by the JCS was ever authorized.

¹JCSM 721-65 to SecDef, 24 September 1965 (~~TOP SECRET~~).

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PHASE I ADD-ONS

(C) There was yet one final episode bearing upon Phase I deployments before the ultimate size of the program was settled. It materialized somewhat anachronistically in the course of follow-on planning for subsequent stages of the war during the CINCPAC Phase II deployment conference held in Honolulu from 27 September to 7 October.

(TS) One of the incidental outcomes of that conference, though the primary purpose was to determine Phase II requirements, was a further revision upward of the last JCS-approved Phase I program. The JCS directive to CINCPAC regarding development of a Phase II program had included instructions to evaluate the capabilities of Phase I deployments as to the adequacy of forces provided for therein to achieve Phase I objectives. Should any shortcomings be identified, the rationale justifying the additional requirements was requested.²

(TS) Capabilities indeed were found deficient and a need for substantially more Phase I forces was uncovered. CINCPAC submitted the additional requirements on 5 October. He advised the JCS that subsequent to the August Honolulu Phase I Deployment Planning Conference it had become apparent that a variety of support forces hitherto not provided for would be necessary to round out the Phase I force levels previously set. These new requirements had been refined further and completed during the course of the current Phase II conference. Both organized units and quantities of personnel were needed to give the force capability necessary to execute and sustain planned Phase I combat operations in Vietnam as well as those launched from elsewhere in Southeast Asia.

(TS) CINCPAC's recommendations called for total additional deployments to South Vietnam of 13,786, consisting of new service support units and personnel to augment existing units. Total additional

¹Msg JCS 9143 to CINCPAC 252211Z, August 1965 (~~TOP SECRET~~).

²JCS 2343/655-14 (~~TOP SECRET~~); CINCPAC Ltr Ser 000345 to JCS, 5 October 1965 (~~TOP SECRET~~).

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deployments for WESTPAC areas other than SVN came to 6,168. The two together made a grand total of almost 20,000 more men. The recommendation was marked by an unusually detailed specificity. Listed on the one hand were several two-man U.S. Army Engineer well-digging detachments, a number of three-man Finance funding detachments, and several psychological warfare detachments ranging in size from two to eight individuals. At the other extreme, the list included large organizations, such as three engineer construction battalions each with a strength of 893 men.¹

(TS) JCS review and processing of these recommended Phase I Add-ons, as they came to be referred to, austerey trimmed down the size of the final requirement. The total figure was considered unrealistically too high generally, and particular portions were not feasible within the time frame of Phase I. Some units requested were not yet in existence; others could not be ready for deployment for another 18 months. At their meeting of 14 October the JCS decided to revise the Phase I program to incorporate the CINCPAC recommended Phase I add-ons but significantly scaled down in dimensions. It took more than a week to coordinate all the line-item deletions and reductions with the Services, but the final JCS-approved add-ons adopted on 22 October amounted to only some 12,500, versus the 20,000 proposed by CINCPAC.²

(TS) On 23 October the JCS submitted their amended Phase I program to the SecDef. It was represented as an updating of the JCS Phase I program, the last revision of which had been forwarded two months earlier on 23 August. Their recommended add-ons provided for additional deployments totalling 9,089 for South Vietnam and 3,445 for other WESTPAC and Southeast Asia areas. The new Phase I Deployment Program, with the add-ons, now would provide for a total U.S. in-country strength in South Vietnam of 219,619. Major deployed U.S. forces

¹JCS 2343/655-14 (~~TOP SECRET~~); CINCPAC Ltr Ser 000345 to JCS, 5 October 1965 (~~TOP SECRET~~).

²JCS 2343/655-17 (~~TOP SECRET~~).

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would consist of 34 maneuver battalions, 22-1/3 engineer battalions, 24 artillery battalions, 4 air defense battalions, 22 tactical fighter squadrons, and 54 helicopter companies/squadrons, plus assorted service and logistic supporting forces. In addition, there would be 10 Allied maneuver battalions in South Vietnam, for a total Allied strength of 21,104. For WESTPAC and Southeast Asia areas other than Vietnam, a total of 43,925 U.S. personnel would be deployed.¹

(S) Having been cast in terms of a revision to an already approved program, the JCS recommended Phase I Add-ons received, as it were, tacit approval by default. There was no particular occasion for a formal SecDef response and none was given. By this time the emphasis being focused on the much larger Phase II program under development overshadowed the relatively modest adjustment to Phase I represented in the Add-ons. Besides, whatever approval was granted by the SecDef or President for such program proposals was at best only in principle, for planning purposes. No actual initiation of troop movements was permitted without separately obtaining express authorization in each case from the SecDef at the time any given deployment was to be implemented. As matters turned out, both Phase I and Phase II were shortly to be overtaken and subsumed under a different, more comprehensive format of proposed deployment programs.

¹JCSM-779-65 to SecDef, 23 October 1965 (~~TOP SECRET~~).

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CHAPTER V

PHASE II DEPLOYMENT PROGRAMS

THE ORIGINAL PHASE II PROGRAM

(25) It was not until the end of September that CINCPAC convened his planning conference, in response to the JCS request of 25 August, to develop coordinated program recommendations for continuation of military operations and further deployments beyond those embraced in Phase I. The conference, held in Honolulu, lasted from 27 September to 7 October. Because of the amount and complexity of coordination necessary, a great many agencies participated. Attending were, besides the CINCPAC staff, representatives of OSD, the Joint Staff, each of the Services, MATS, CONARC, COMTAC, STRICOM, USARPAC, PACAF, PACFLT, FMFPAC, MACV, MACTHAI, 2nd Air Division, and U.S. Army Vietnam.¹

(26) The work of the conference ranged in breadth and depth, covering many other aspects besides force-level considerations alone. The results, formally submitted to the JCS on 7 October, were embodied in a thick document titled "CINCPAC Phase II Program for Continuation of Military Operations in Southeast Asia and the Western Pacific and for Deployments of Additional U.S. Forces, Personnel, and Materiel to Those Areas". It was nevertheless presented as only a partial response to all that the JCS had requested in their 25 August directive.

(28) Some attention was given to further elaboration upon the phase concept. The term Phase I was defined as the initial set of force requirements and deployments to cope with the immediate problem of assisting the Government of Vietnam and "stop losing the war". Phase II was defined as a natural follow-on and logical extension of

¹JCS 2343/655-15 (~~TOP SECRET~~).

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Phase I and was designated the "phase in which we start winning". Phase II was not conceived of as a finite period but one during which capabilities and level of effort would progressively increase. Other, subsequent phases would be developed as required.

(PS) Major additional force requirements identified for Phase II were substantial. A total of 28 more maneuver battalions would be needed. To provide this number, two more infantry divisions would have to be deployed (designated as the 25th and the 4th), an armored cavalry regiment, and the remainder of the 1st Marine Division, which would place two full Marine divisions in-country. When all were deployed there would be, with the Phase I commitment, a ground combat force consisting of 62 U.S. maneuver battalions, plus the ten Allied battalions. Proportionate increases in combat support, service support, and logistics forces were also necessary.

(PS) Related combat aircraft requirements posed special difficulties. In the past, TFS requirements had been determined by a formula based on a planning factor of [] sorties per day per U.S. maneuver battalion, which came to [] TFSs required in SVN for Phase I. But because of limited airfield capacity and delays in the pace of constructing new facilities, the scheduled squadrons had not been deployed into South Vietnam at a rate commensurate with mounting sortie requirements associated with the growing number of battalions arriving in-country. In fact, to provide the needed sortie capability, it had already been necessary to resort to the use of one and sometimes two CVAs to fill the gap. In light of the above situation, Phase II combat aircraft requirements were being based on a revised formula. Originally the Phase II needs had been determined to be 10 more TFSs, but, because of improved close air support capabilities resulting from more armed-configured helicopters, as well as additional field artillery battalions being available and significant increase in employment of ARC LIGHT B-52 forces, the planning factor for Phase II had been adjusted downward from the previous ratio to [] sorties per day per

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maneuver battalion. This allowed reducing the original estimated requirement for additional TFSs for Phase II from ten more to only four more squadrons. Partly reflecting the above rationale, however, twelve more helicopter companies/squadrons were also proposed for Phase II.

(TS) The total sum of additional forces required to be deployed to South Vietnam for Phase II came to 112,825 personnel, all of them U.S. It was contemplated that the bulk of the units, particularly the combat elements, would arrive at various times throughout 1966, with the remainder during the first half of the following year.

(TS) Besides the deployments to South Vietnam, Phase II force requirements for other areas in Southeast Asia and WESTPAC were identified. These totalled another 26,278, of which approximately 6,500 were earmarked for Thailand. The latter were to be service support units intended to prepare a logistic base for future deployment of combat troops.

(TS) Finally, as part of the operational concept, the recommended Phase II program called for greater military pressure directly against North Vietnam. A requirement was accordingly identified for an 8-inch-gun Cruiser for naval gunfire shore bombardment of DRV targets. Also proposed at the same time was possible use of SAC forces to augment air strikes against North Vietnam.

(TS) Before closing, CINCPAC took the opportunity to insert a general reference touching upon the subject of degradation of PACOM strategic capability, particularly depletion of theater ground combat reserves, posed by Vietnam demands. He stressed the other PACOM missions and tasks connected with ongoing responsibilities assigned in JCSP-66 in addition to conducting Vietnam operations. Though provisions for reconstitution of the PACOM Reserve had not been included as part of the Phase II program proper, CINCPAC pointed out that this requirement would be of critical importance following

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deployment of Phase II forces. Once the entire 25th Infantry Division left Hawaii, movement of a replacement CONUS division to PACOM would be necessary to meet emergency needs. Even then shortfalls in combat support and combat service support would be serious. As for Marine Corps resources, Phase II would "unacceptably deplete the PACOM amphibious reserve", leaving no source for a Special Landing Force (SLF) required as a theater contingency force. Therefore an additional RLT would be needed for Okinawa, plus the necessary command and control elements and combat service support units of a Marine Amphibious Brigade, which did not exist in PACOM -- MAB aviation however was available. To make his case more forceful, CINCPAC cautioned that another crisis might arise in the PACOM area so grave as to require withdrawing a combat division and supporting forces from South Vietnam.¹

(S) Receipt of the CINCPAC Phase II program recommendations precipitated a great deal of high level discussion and staffing attention in Washington over the period of the next month before being formally acted upon further. Generating the necessary coordinated decision response to what was a thoroughly unpalatable proposal proved both time consuming and complex. There was little objection to the basic desirability and need for increasing U.S. force commitments. But the validity of the stated requirement in the dimensions submitted was challenged. A universal initial reaction in Washington was that the unexpected size was inordinately too large and every effort should be bent toward paring it down wherever possible. Accordingly, the justification for each specific item was examined and reexamined exhaustively in hopes of pruning everything that was not absolutely essential.

(S) The CINCPAC planning conference, however, had anticipated Washington's reaction and, reflecting the stern criteria repeatedly imposed by the Joint Staff and the Service staffs, had already reduced the Phase II program to the barest austere minimum. In fact, it was agreed at the time that combat deployments would be emphasized at the

¹CINCPAC Ltr to JCS Ser 000347, 7 October 65, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

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expense of perhaps a not fully adequate logistic support base. It was recognized that overall combat effectiveness would thereby be somewhat impaired, but a marginal support structure was considered preferable in the balance. In the interests of carrying out COMUSMACV's operational concept, the prime concern of the moment was having the maximum number of combat troops in-country as soon as possible. Presumably the desired level of support troops could be achieved later if it were found necessary to do so. As matters turned out, there indeed proved to be little fat left to trim when CINCPAC's Phase II program was subjected to the searching scrutiny of the Washington review cycle.¹

(TS) One of the first steps taken in processing the CINCPAC proposal was to seek confirmation from the source. The Director for Operations (J-3) of the USMACV staff was summoned to Washington to provide authoritative detailed testimony at first hand in defense of the program. On 18 October he briefed the SecDef, Dep SecDef, Asst SecDef (ISA), the Service Secretaries, and the JCS. The case he presented in support of the Phase II requirements proved a convincing one and he succeeded in establishing just about everything proposed in the CINCPAC program as a bona fide MACV need. Largely through his efforts, corroborated and seconded by the support of the JCS members who individually were already favorably predisposed, most of those attending the briefing generally came around to accept the inevitability of a Phase II force augmentation somewhere on the order of magnitude² recommended.

(TS) Immediately new considerations arose. The question now was how best to meet requirements of such extent in view of the limited resources available. The national military establishment, despite the Vietnam commitments already made, was still being held to an essentially peacetime configuration. If at all possible, the Administration was

¹CINCPAC Command History 1965 op.cit., ~~TOP SECRET~~; Interviews No. 1A, 7, and 11, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

²JCS 2343/655-19, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

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determined to avoid resorting to major expansion on anything resembling a mobilization scale. Therefore, following the MACV J-3 briefing, the SecDef directed that capabilities be evaluated. He requested the CJCS to have studies prepared on the implementation of the proposed Phase II deployment program under two different sets of conditions:

Case I - assuming no call-up of Reserves,

Case II - assuming Reserve units and personnel are called up as required.

He further instructed that two separate variants of Case I be examined based upon the following criteria:

a. A prompt decision, i.e., within 30 days, to undertake the MACV requested Phase II augmentation.

b. A deferred decision to proceed, i.e., 60 to 120 days hence.

It was the SecDef's desire that a first cut at these studies be ready by 22 October.¹

(TS) The JCS, meeting again the next day, discussed the SecDef request and agreed to have the Joint Staff, in cooperation with the Service staffs, undertake the required study. The same day, 19 October, the CJCS formally so directed.² An interim response was conveyed to the SecDef three days later. Eventually the fully staffed findings were incorporated as part of the JCS recommendations on the Phase II program.

Meantime the actual movement of forces into South Vietnam was progressing apace. By the end of October most of the Phase I major combat units requested for deployment in 1965 had arrived in-country. All of the 1st Cavalry Airmobile Division and the remainder of the 1st Infantry Division had closed, as well as the bulk of the ROK Division. The steady stream of support forces was also speeded up, including combat support and service support units, additional logistics

¹CM 917-65 to DJS 19 October 65, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

²Ibid.

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elements, and individual personnel augmentations. These were becoming more and more involved in large scale tactical engagements. The October month-end strength figure for U.S. forces deployed in-country had climbed to 153,279. More were approved and in some stage of preparation or on the way.

(TS) JCS staffing of the CINCPAC-proposed Phase II program, complicated as it further was by an unfixed capabilities frame of reference, proved a difficult and trying process. It went through seven JCS greens before a decision approving the final version was reached on 8 November. There still remained a great many unknown factors and unresolved problems, most of which were taken into account and addressed as issues bearing upon what the JCS were recommending. Included was a discussion of a number of unanswered questions and their implications. Nevertheless, on 10 November the JCS forwarded their Phase II program recommendation to the SecDef. In substance, the program itself represented essentially concurrence in nearly all the deployments that CINCPAC had proposed.¹

(TS) The JCS recommendation to the SecDef, however, contained far more than just a deployment program. As indicated in the subject title, "Future Operations and Force Deployments with Respect to the War in Vietnam", and by the fact that with the appendixes and annexes the total volume came to 127 pages, a thorough comprehensive approach was intended. The JCS first summarized the detailed concepts of operations planned in furtherance of the overall strategic concept for the conduct of the war in Southeast Asia. These as well as the proposed force deployments were identified as oriented toward 3 military objectives:

- a. Cause the DRV to cease its direction and support of the VC insurgency, and reduce the communist capability to support insurgency in Laos.

¹JCS 2343/655-26, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

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b. Assist the RVN armed forces to defeat the VC and extend GVN control over all of the RVN.

c. Deter ChiCom intervention in Southeast Asia and improve PACOM posture to defeat such intervention should it occur.

(TS) They then stated that results so far from commitments of U.S. forces to date were encouraging. It was imperative to reinforce this limited success by continuing and increasing the momentum. Therefore, the JCS concurred in CINCPAC's evaluation that more forces than those provided for in Phase I would be required for the intensified offensive actions necessary to seize the initiative and attain the objectives of the concept of operations. These additional force requirements for Phase II were then outlined.

(TS) For Vietnam, deployment of the following U.S. forces beyond the Phase I levels was needed:

- 2 more U.S. Army Divisions,
- Remainder of the 1st Marine Division,
- 1 Armored Cavalry Regiment,
- 4 Tactical Fighter Squadrons,

Appropriate support forces for the above.

The total requirement for Vietnam came to approximately 113,000 U.S. personnel. Of this total, the JCS were seeking further justification for 13,350 of the support troops.

(TS) For WESTPAC areas other than South Vietnam, a total of 26,000 were needed to support Vietnam operations and to reconstitute CINCPAC's amphibious reserves. Five thousand of this total, however, was subject to further justification.

(TS) The above requirements statement, it was noted, reflected the JCS-refined version of the agreements and coordinated deployment program schedule developed and adopted at the Honolulu conference of 27 September - 7 October, which CINCPAC had approved and forwarded. Actually the JCS had made no significant changes. The combat element

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requirement was identical, while the rest, other than those relatively minor portions being held in abeyance pending validation, was substantially the same as that originally requested by COMUSMACV and confirmed by CINCPAC. Moreover, there was also a measure of internal inconsistency in the figures cited in different parts of the JCS requirements submission. Part I of Appendix D, which presented a detailed breakdown of the Phase II deployment program, gave the total for Vietnam as 112,430, whereas in the main body of the memorandum the JCS referred to the total as around 113,000. And for deployments to areas other than South Vietnam, Part II of the same appendix gave the total as 27,106 instead of the earlier mentioned 26,000. These discrepancies, however, had little meaning, inasmuch as the totals given included those forces that the JCS themselves had admittedly not yet approved.

(PS) Nonetheless the aggregate force commitment when the recommended Phase II program was carried out would be massive. A recapitulation of the major combat deployments provided for in the two programs revealed the following totals:

Phase I (219,619 U.S. personnel) - 34 maneuver battalions, 24 field artillery battalions, 4 air defense artillery battalions, 22 tactical fighter squadrons, 54 helicopter companies/squadrons.

Phase II (112,430 U.S. personnel) - 28 maneuver battalions, 17-1/3 field artillery battalions, 5 air defense artillery battalions, 4 TFSs, 12 helicopter companies/squadrons.

Grand Total U.S. Forces in South Vietnam (Phases I and II together) - 332,049 personnel, resulting in 62 maneuver battalions, 41-1/3 field artillery battalions, 9 air defense artillery battalions, 26 tactical fighter squadrons, and 66 helicopter companies/squadrons.

In addition there would be the 10 Allied maneuver battalions (ROK, Australian), plus their own integral field artillery as well as supporting elements, deployed in South Vietnam. At the same time, it

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was also planned that RVN forces would be substantially increased and improved in quality.

(PS) Offered as a directly related component of the Phase II deployment program for South Vietnam was a reopening of proposals for stepped-up pressure against North Vietnam. The JCS recommended an accelerated campaign of air strikes against the DRV to commence immediately. They urged that it include all military and war-supporting targets as well as aerial mining of principal ports.

(PS) The JCS then addressed themselves to the deployment decision options and issues involved in providing the forces required for Phase II. From evaluations of Service resources it had been concluded that the forces necessary could be made available, but, depending on decision circumstances, at various prices to be paid. Timeliness of a national decision was an important determining factor. In Case 1a, with no Reserve callup and assuming a decision to deploy were made by 1 December 1965, the deployments could be executed in the light of projected capabilities, though on a stretched out schedule that would not meet all of CINCPAC's desired closure dates. In Case 1b, again with no Reserve callup but assuming the decision to deploy were delayed until 1 March 1966, the deployments could also be executed though at the cost of proportionately greater slippage. In Case 2, with Reserve units and individuals being called up and terms of service extended as required, and assuming the Phase II deployments were executed as rapidly as possible, it would be feasible to meet CINCPAC's desired schedule for major units and with minimal slippage for the remainder. Attachments containing Service statements presented the attendant and consequent problems under each case category in specific detail. All Services would be under some strain in any event, and without a Reserve callup and extensions of terms of service, the U.S. Army and Marine Corps particularly would be hard pressed to meet the requirements even on the basis of stretching out the schedule. Clearly the JCS were opting in favor of Case 2.

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(TS) The JCS took the opportunity to draw special attention to a larger long-term problem coming to a head that was related to the deployments under consideration. There was a compelling need to reconstitute the U.S. worldwide strategic military posture and restore an adequate training and rotation base. They referred to their earlier position in this connection already taken with respect to Phase I deployments. Now, in light of the upcoming Phase II deployments, matters would be that much worse. The whole problem would be readdressed separately by the JCS and their updated views and recommendations in this regard forwarded to the SecDef in the near future.

(TS) Finally, the JCS summed up their recommendations for the Phase II deployment program to the SecDef. They recommended that the air strikes against the DRV and in Laos, as outlined, be approved for immediate execution by air forces now in place. They urged that steps be taken to provide the proposed additional U.S. forces for Phase II, subject to continuing evaluation by the JCS, and that the forces listed be approved for planning and budgeting purposes now. They recommended that a callup of selected reserve units and individuals, the activation of new units, and extension of terms of service, as necessary in order to meet desired deployment dates, be authorized. On the last, an early decision was requested. Thus the JCS were in effect recommending the Case 2 option.¹

(TS) Concern over the serious depletion of strategic reserves prompted the JCS to prepare their promised separate review and updating of such requirements earlier than planned. Its timing was designed to reinforce the last recommendation in connection with the Phase II program pressing for a reserve callup and extension of terms of service.² That same day, 10 November, they therefore also submitted to the SecDef a list of force requirements stemming from Southeast Asia deployments. These were identified as necessary in order to reconstitute the strategic reserves and maintain U.S. military posture.

¹JCSM 811-65 to SecDef, 10 November 1965.

²JCS 2343/640-2, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

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Among the specific purposes to be served were: to provide a rotation and training base; to fulfill military commitments elsewhere in the world; and to restore capabilities for dealing with contingencies.

As a result of Phase I, the following forces were needed:

(S) The total dimensions of these strategic secondary force requirements flowing directly or indirectly from the burgeoning demands of the Vietnam war were indeed becoming impressive. They were to get much bigger before there would be any appreciable alleviation of the severe strain on capabilities. In fact, as deployment programs

¹JCSM 814-65 for SecDef, 10 November 65, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

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expanded at a faster pace than the relaxing of restrictions on the always limited resources available, the gap widened. Yet the Administration would steadfastly refuse to go on a national wartime footing. Hereafter the course of the war, insofar as level of force commitment was concerned, would be determined by a dialectic between opposing realities - the politically feasible versus the militarily expedient. Policy was destined to be the resultant from an interaction of the two.

THE NOVEMBER PRESIDENTIAL DECISIONS

(25) The very next day (11 November), following receipt of the JCS proposals, the SecDef presented them to the President for decision. In a day-long conference at the LBJ ranch in Texas, attended by the SecDef, SecState, and other top officials, the Phase II program and related force requirements were discussed at length. This time no profound new decision juncture was being confronted, for the basic issue had long been joined and resolved. All that was under consideration now was a natural follow-through on that commitment. Nevertheless, sufficient doubts and hesitation over some of the implications arose to preclude an unequivocal disposition of the entire package of proposals.

(25) The upshot of the deliberations was a broad, far-reaching policy decision by the President, the main thrust of which was in favor of whatever force increases were necessary. Specifically, he granted qualified approval for the Phase II program, but ruled that callup of Reserves and the other recommended measures would be deferred for the time being, though a modest expansion of Service manpower ceilings through normal sources was authorized. The terms were left flexible, with the exact scale and pace of buildup unspecified except that every effort would be made to comply with COMUSMACV's needs. The bulk of the forces would thus have to be provided largely from existing capabilities and the required deployments carried out as best they could within these constraints. It was fully recognized

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that, to do so, considerable adjustments would be necessary within the military establishment, and possibly at the price of some slippage and perhaps shortfalls in the deployment program itself. Nevertheless, it was deemed feasible and the consequences acceptable. Any untoward serious problems, it was agreed, could be dealt with when they arose. On assurances of the SecDef that Phase II augmentation was manageable under these conditions, the implementing details were left up to him and the JCS. Meanwhile the ancillary proposals for reconstituting the strategic posture were neither adopted nor rejected. The stepped-up air strikes against the North, however, were turned down.

(U) That same evening after the conference the SecDef publicly announced to the press that additional troops would be sent to Vietnam. He revealed that the strength of U.S. forces then deployed there numbered 160,000, but VC strength, despite heavy losses, continued to increase. Therefore, a larger force commitment was necessary, although he did not disclose how much more was planned. He did state, however, "The President instructed me to meet the requirements of our military commanders as they are received".¹

(S) Public announcements notwithstanding, neither the Phase II deployment recommendations nor the proposal for reconstitution of strategic posture brought an explicit formal response from the SecDef at the time. Presumably the JCS learned what the decision was, but the Joint Staff was not informed officially. De facto, however, the deployment program, by virtue of not having been expressly disapproved, acquired by default as it were the status of apparently having been accepted and approved in principle. Later OSD references to it suggest that it remained in this limbo state even after being overtaken by subsequent consolidated force requirements submissions of greater scope that comprehensively embraced the Phase II program and more. As in the past, this lack of feed-back tended to compound unnecessarily the difficulties of systematic staff follow-through in what was already

¹ New York Times, 12 November 1965.

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a thoroughly confused deployments planning picture. In any event, programs as such were for all practical purposes meaningless with respect to the actual implementation of deployments, for troop movements could only be executed on the basis of final authorization being granted case-by-case by the SecDef for each given unit individually.

PHASE IIA PROGRAM

(TS) No sooner had the Phase II program been adopted than new factors injected themselves to alter force-level requirements and revise deployment programs radically. Even before the Presidential action, OB indications had begun to come in pointing to an alarming influx of DRV troops into South Vietnam. On 21 November COMUSMACV was compelled to report new intelligence assessments showing enemy strength mounting at a rate more than double previous estimates. The earlier predicted relative force ratio of 3.3 to 1 by the end of 1966 would not be achieved. Instead, an adverse trend had set in. Rather than improving, force ratios were already down to 2.8 to 1, and, projected on the basis of the enemy buildup continuing at the present rate, ratios were now expected to decline to 2.2 to 1 by the end of 1966, even if all Phase II deployments were completed as planned.¹

(TS) Other intelligence evaluations reinforced this pessimistic forecast, while events, in the form of increasing large-scale enemy tactical offensives, corroborated that the DRV and VC had elected to respond to the U.S. deployments by an escalation of their own. U.S. forces were now regularly involved in a growing series of fierce battles. For the one-week period ending midnight 20 November, American casualties were 240 killed in action.²

(TS) One of the first reactions of the JCS was finally to place a request for the USIB to have a formal SNIE prepared assessing enemy capabilities and the probable repercussions flowing from U.S./GVN efforts to reduce them. In due course the SNIE was produced, but

¹Msg COMUSMACV to CINCPAC Info JCS 210122Z November 65, ~~TOP SECRET/~~ LIMITED DISTRIBUTION.

²NMCC EA Records, ~~TOP SECRET~~; Interview No. 14, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

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proved somewhat anachronistic. As will be seen later, by the time it appeared it had little impact other than to confirm estimates and expectations already acted upon.

(S) The disturbing news on the deteriorating OB balance meanwhile was also brought to the attention of the SecDef and prompted his direct personal intervention. Once again he elected to bypass regular institutional channels in order to assess the military situation and its implications himself on the scene. On 27-28 November, following a NATO meeting, he, accompanied by the CJCS, diverted his return trip from Europe to pay an unscheduled visit to USMACV Headquarters in Saigon.

(TS) In the series of briefings given to the SecDef and his party a somber situation was depicted. Militarily, not only was enemy strength improving, with ever greater involvement of DRV forces, but simultaneously ARVN was weakening and progressively less able to cope effectively with the VC/DRV in either tactical combat or in pacification operations. Politically, the demoralized civil populace had lost confidence in the Saigon Government.

(TS) Latest intelligence estimates placed current enemy in-country strength at 220,000, composed of 113 combat battalion equivalents (86 VC and 27 DRV). By drawing on existing manpower resources in the South and infiltrating troops from the North, 42 additional battalions could be activated over the period of the next year. Thus, the enemy was capable of marshalling a total of 113 combat battalions in South Vietnam by the end of 1966.¹ The inescapable conclusion was that more friendly forces to offset enemy increases were needed now and yet more would be necessary in the future.

(TS) Clearly things were not going well and the prospects were that they were bound to get much worse if something was not done soon. There was little likelihood of any significant increase in numbers or improvement in quality of South Vietnamese forces. For the present,

¹Note: This proved to be a gross underestimate. Actually, by the end of Dec 1966, U.S. intelligence had identified 95 NVA combat battalions and 97 VC, making a total of 192.

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in view of the already acute stage of deteriorating circumstances, the only hope of arresting the adverse trend and salvaging the situation from what appeared inevitable if not perhaps imminent collapse was greater U.S. force commitments. Timing was crucial. Over the immediate short term, more U.S. troops were required as speedily as possible, and ultimately, much more than those provided for in deployment programs planned so far. Accordingly, COMUSMACV and his staff urged that the Phase II deployments be accelerated to bring the forces in earlier than scheduled. They outlined a concept of operations for employing them and, at the same time, expressed a requirement for additional support and logistics units substantially beyond the Phase II program. The extent of the total U.S. force goals contemplated for Vietnam, including the related add-on requirements just generated, now came to almost 390,000. It was recommended that another deployment planning conference therefore be held at CINCPAC headquarters without delay to develop the necessary new Phase IIA program accordingly.

(S) Besides the relatively firm requirements described above, COMUSMACV and his staff even projected tentative force goals into 1967 that foresaw a need for an additional three-division Corps. Part of this might be made up of another third-country force, suggesting possibly one more ROK division plus Australian or Philippine contributions.

(S) Impressed by the briefings, the SecDef was inclined to look with favor on the proposal for speeding up Phase II deployments and indicated as much. Moreover, he was also favorably predisposed toward expanding them as proposed. He then asked for a breakdown of what else was needed to be added to the present Phase II program. The request, however, was somewhat premature as far as the MACV staff was concerned, for the whole matter had not yet been delved into deeply enough to identify the specific requirements in detail. It had only been broached as a concept, on the assumption that the coordination

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and staffing of the troop lists and schedules would be worked out in due course depending on what its reception warranted. Accordingly, a list of the desired principal support units was hastily improvised on short notice. Unfortunately - partly because of the pressure of time, coupled with the fact that the MACV action officer charged with preparing it happened to be an Army officer - the resulting requirements list that was put into the briefing book handed to the SecDef was incomplete and, moreover, took into account U.S. Army units almost exclusively; it called for 56,700 add-ons, of which less than 5000 were to be from other Services. Referred to as the "27 Actions List", it nevertheless became an officially binding fait accompli for a time, by virtue of having been inserted into the formal decision-making system at a key point. The bypassing of intervening echelons thereby precluded the customary coordination and editing processes that it normally would have been subjected to had regular channels been followed.

(25) The SecDef, immediately upon returning to Washington, lost no time in acting upon the ad hoc requirements that he personally brought back from Saigon. On 30 November, on his own without further consulting the JCS, he approved the "South Vietnam Action List" stemming from the briefings given him on his recent visit just completed. Although "27 action items" were referred to, it actually contained 31, and various agencies, including the JCS, were assigned responsibility for executing each item. On 1 December a formal directive to this effect was issued by the Asst SecDef (Manpower). It instructed the JCS to add to the present Phase II troop deployment schedule 25 more maneuver battalions (U.S./Allied) and an assortment of U.S. support units, of which the U.S. total came to 56,700 more personnel. These were identified as Phase IIA forces, and the principal additional unit were to consist of:

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<u>U.S.</u>	<u>ROK</u>	<u>Australia</u>
1 Infantry Division	1 Division	1 Infantry Bn
1 Infantry Brigade	1 Brigade	
2 Air Cavalry Squadrons		
1 Airmobile Inf. Bn		
7 Lt Helo Cos		
3 Med Helo Cos		
5 TFSs		
1 TCS (C-130)		

The January 1966 Supplemental Appropriation requests for each Service would be expanded to accommodate the additional troops required for Phase IIA. As noted earlier, however, the overwhelming bulk of these were U.S. Army. Meanwhile, the JCS were to set up a conference in Honolulu to work out the necessary details of troop lists and deployment schedules accordingly.

(76) Over and above Phase IIA proper, 2500 replacements for the 1st Air Cavalry Division were to be provided on an expedited basis now, as well as 7 Army aviation companies for surveillance purposes. At the same time, instructions were also given to lay out a plan for deploying an additional Corps of 3 more divisions in CY 1967, while another airmobile cavalry division was to be activated as early as feasible.

(78) In connection with the above, the JCS and Services were directed to examine troop strength and "contingency capability" at the conclusion of Phase IIA assuming no call-up of Reserves. Munitions availability was similarly to be reviewed. Finally, a variety of associated matters to be taken care of were covered, such as logistics, construction, funding, and legal and diplomatic actions.¹

(6) Receipt of the OSD directives pertaining to Phase IIA was the first time these new requirements were formally introduced into the JCS and CINCPAC staffing systems. Needless to say, coming by

¹Memo Asst SecDef (Manpower) for JCS et al, 1 December 65, ~~TOP SECRET~~; JCS 2343/724, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

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surprise from the top down in an unusual form and via an unexpected channel, they had a dislocating impact on staff processes. Not only did the substance imply a sudden radical departure from past deployment policy, but the decisions had actually been made already.

(TS) The JCS immediately set the Joint Staff to work to perform the backing-and-filling function of what was now an exercise in post-facto staffing. Clearly the Phase IIA force package as described was incomplete and imbalanced. If the Vietnam force commitment was to be increased by an added increment of this order it would have to be redesigned completely.¹

(TS) One of the first JCS actions was to direct CINCPAC, on 2 December, to convene another deployment planning conference as soon as possible.² The JCS, pressing for conference results, received an interim reply from CINCPAC on 8 December giving the status of developments and promising the final plan within several days. A day later COMUSMACV, on instructions of CINCPAC, forwarded an advance copy of his statement of force requirements for Phase IIA to CINCPAC and the JCS. These had been revised upward somewhat from the impromptu figure of 56,700 originally given the SecDef on 28 November and now came to a total of approximately 65,000.³ COMUSMACV followed this the very next day (9 November) with an urgent request for accelerating, almost on a crash basis, the deployment of the 25th Infantry Division, which the SecDef quickly approved.⁴

(TS) On 10 December the JCS-requested SNIE was published. Its main emphasis no longer was on assessing the situation in terms of enemy capabilities but on forecasting enemy response to U.S. courses of action. The conclusion was that there would be no untoward hostile military reaction to the U.S. buildup in South Vietnam and to intensify

¹JCS 2343/724-4, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

²Msg JCS 7699 to CINCPAC et al 022247Z December 65, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

³COMUSMACV Ltr Ser No. TS-00017444-65 to CINCPAC, JCS et al, 9 December 65, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

⁴Msg COMUSMACV to CINCPAC Info JCS 091157Z December 65, ~~TOP SECRET~~; Msg SecDef to COMUSMACV et al 112125Z 11 December 65, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

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air attacks on the DRV. Instead, if within the next year or so U.S./ forces appeared to be clearly on the way to destroying VC/PAVN capability for carrying on the insurgency at significant levels, and assuming bombing of the North were also stepped up, there would probably be a Communist "retrenchment" rather than a larger DRV or CHICOM commitment. Despite a consensus on these general conclusions, the body of the SNIE contained a great many splits among member agencies of the intelligence community on numerous specific points. Minority views were expressed in footnotes.¹

(S) Six days later, Annex A to the SNIE above was published. It addressed itself to appraising enemy capabilities in South Vietnam in a more strictly OB sense. It was estimated that as of 15 November there were 9 PAVN regiments in South Vietnam consisting of 27 Infantry battalions. The DRV were considered capable of infiltrating 36 new PAVN regiments during 1966 at the rate of 9 battalions per month. Current VC/PAVN forces in South Vietnam were put at 110 combat battalions. During 1966, the VC were deemed capable of fielding 2 new battalions plus 2500 replacements per month. Thus the estimated enemy strength- VC and PAVN combined - that would be reached by the end of 1966, taking into account expected losses and gains, could well total approximately 155 combat battalions.²

THE SECDEF DECEMBER PLAN

(S) The SecDef decisions resulting from his Saigon visit meanwhile crystallized further. While the JCS and CINCPAC were trying to establish force requirements and develop a coordinated deployment plan as directed, the SecDef in the interim formally submitted his own program to the President on 11 December. Identified by the SecDef as his "December Plan", it was presented as the basis for requesting FY 1966 Southeast Asia supplemental appropriations. Spelled out in

¹ SNIE 10-12-65, 10 December 65, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

² Annex A to SNIE 10-12-65, 16 December 65, ~~SECRET~~.

Note: As indicated earlier, intelligence subsequently established a total of 192 enemy combat battalions by the end of 1966.

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specific detail was a program of "deployment assumptions for planning" It provided for more than double the U.S. strength in the SecDef "July Plan", but on a curve rising sharply through 1966 and not reaching a peak until June 1967. Combatant elements, however, would reach a plateau by the end of 1966. Third-country forces were not covered. Specifications were given in the form of tables showing the composition of U.S. forces to be deployed and comparing the current December Plan with its predecessor, the July Plan, as follows:

	1965		1966		1967
	July	December	June	December	June
<u>Personnel</u>					
July Plan	78,100	186,700	189,600	190,100	190,100
Dec Plan	81,400	194,900	277,100	367,500	393,700
<u>Maneuver Bns</u>					
July Plan	17	34	34	34	34
*Dec Plan	17	34	46	75	75
<u>Combat Spt Bns</u>					
July Plan	8-1/3	36-1/3	26-1/3	26-1/2	26-1/3
Dec Plan	8-2/3	29-1/3	38-2/3	59-2/3	59-2/3
<u>Engineer Bns</u>					
July Plan	7-1/3	19	20	20	20
Dec Plan	7-1/3	22-1/3	34	46-1/3	46-1/3
<u>Helicopters</u>					
July Plan	491	1,514	1,694	1,730	1,730
Dec Plan	523	1,466	1,748	2,391	2,895
<u>Attack Capable Aircraft</u>					
July Plan	531	777	777	777	777
Dec Plan	507	679	793	929	929

*Later the December Plan was revised upward somewhat to provide for 77 U.S. maneuver battalions by the end of CY 66 and with a small increase in total U.S. strength accordingly.

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(TS) The grand total increase in U.S. armed forces associated with Southeast Asia that would be required in CY 66 came to approximately 378,500 additional military personnel above presently authorized Service ceilings. About 106,000 of this represented what was needed to fulfill actual Southeast Asia deployment quotas (remainder coming from currently existing force assets), plus approximately 272,500 more needed for strategic reserves and rotational base. The total recommended supplemental appropriation for FY 1966 amounted to \$12.6 billion primarily to support the expanded U.S. military effort in Southeast Asia, of which \$9.5 billion was directly related to Vietnam operations.

(TS) At the White House the December Plan was adopted and supplemental appropriations were obtained accordingly. This time a copy was formally transmitted to the JCS. The accompanying Dep SecDef memorandum to the CJCS that conveyed it contained added instructions making the Plan far more than a fiscal frame of reference. The SecDef December Plan had become the official national plan and henceforth would be governing. The Dep SecDef so apprised the JCS, stating explicitly that it was now the approved deployment plan and any change had to be submitted by the JCS to the SecDef for approval.²

(TS) In effect the SecDef December Plan comprised an aggregation of all deployment programs hitherto developed. In addition, it incorporated recent substantial additions well beyond them that had grown out of the ad hoc requirements generated during the SecDef's impromptu visit to USMACV Headquarters in late November. It thus embraced Phase I, Phase I Add-ons, Phase II, the as yet not fully defined Phase IIA, and a large extra increment not identified with any of the past programs. Moreover, it called for considerable acceleration in deployment schedules for most forces.

(TS) Simultaneously with the emergence of the December Plan setting forth what the size and pace of the U.S. force commitment would

¹ Memo SecDef for the President, 11 December 65, ~~TOP SECRET~~, JCS 2458/42-12, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

² Memo Dep SecDef for CJCS, et al, 15 December 65, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

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(b)(7)
(A)(5)

be, steps were taken to expand third-country force contributions. It was decided that the [] was a likely source of 12 more maneuver battalions, i.e., an additional division force and an additional brigade force. The necessary diplomatic negotiations were immediately undertaken. The [] was willing but took a hard-line bargaining position until eventually the U.S. agreed to compensate with added military and economic aid. Among the concessions was that the U.S. would provide replacement Table of Equipment for 5-1/3 [] All of the new [] would close in South Vietnam within the first half of 1966.¹

(25) Thus by mid-December a massive quantum increase in the size of force commitment for Vietnam had suddenly emerged and crystallized. The U.S. deployments, coupled with the added ROK forces, would together amount to a combat force of around 100 maneuver battalions, for a total U.S./Allied in-country strength of approximately 425,000 military personnel. The primary tactical combat elements were equivalent to more than 10 standard divisions.

PHASE IIA-REVISED AND THE 101 U.S./ALLIED
BATTALION REQUIREMENT

(26) Shortly after the basic decision on what forces would be deployed had been made, the determination of what forces were required appeared. On 16 December CINCPAC submitted the formal response to the JCS directive of 2 December requesting, on instructions of the SecDef, the reprogrammed phased deployment requirements for CY 1966. In the course of developing it, the last additions designated as Phase IIA were reprocessed and revised to take into account further necessary increases not included in the original incomplete statement of requirements. Phase IIA-Revised now amounted to an increment of approximately 69,000 more U.S. troops for South Vietnam, plus about another 125,000 for other PACOM areas.

¹Msg SecDef 8252 to CINCPAC et al 092023Z December 65, ~~TOP SECRET~~; Msg State 588 to Seoul et al 17 December 65, ~~TOP SECRET~~; Msg Seoul 682 to SecState 030820Z January 66, ~~TOP SECRET~~; Memo SecDef for CJCS et al, 14 January 66, ~~TOP SECRET~~.

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(TS) However, Phase IIA-Revised was incorporated into an integrated deployment priority list of all forces required in CY 66, in which were consolidated all those forces that had not yet been deployed irrespective of "Phase" designation. It provided for a massive U.S./Allied force based on a total of 101 maneuver battalions in South Vietnam by the end of CY 66. The 101 maneuver battalion figure would consist of 94 Infantry and 3 tank battalions, 1 mechanized battalion, and 3 armored cavalry squadrons, but did not include air cavalry units and division reconnaissance elements. A total of 33 tactical jet squadrons were also required by the end of the CY 66 period (23 USAF and 10 USMC), plus additional jet airfields as well as expansion of existing facilities. Increases in related ground air defense that this would necessitate came to 11 more HAWK battalions, 13 more M-42 battalions, and 16 M-55 (Quad 50) batteries. In addition, reconstitution of PACOM reserves was urgently needed during the second quarter of 1966, inasmuch as all Army Reserves and all USMC amphibious troops available in the theater would be depleted by then.

(TS) Recapitulating the requirements, 221,131 additional U.S. personnel were needed in South Vietnam by the end of CY 66. With the Phase I forces, this would bring the U.S. in-country total to 441,150, and provide for 78 U.S. maneuver battalions, 36 TFSs, and 79 helicopter companies/squadrons. Third-country forces (mostly ROK) would be 23,550 more in 1966 (13 additional maneuver battalions), bringing third-country totals up to 44,654 (23 ROK/ANZAC maneuver battalions). Together, total deployed U.S./Allied strength required in South Vietnam by the end of 1966 came to 485,804, which would provide for the necessary 101 maneuver battalion combat force and associated support forces. Requirements for PACOM areas other than South Vietnam amounted to another [

] The grand total of all U.S. force requirements for both South Vietnam and other PACOM areas by the end of 1966 []

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(8) CINCPAC's statement of the CY 66 force requirements marked the abandonment of the now meaningless "Phase" terminology formerly employed to designate force increments. Nevertheless, what had been hitherto identified as Phase IIA, then as Phase IIA-Revised, was later yet to be further amended upward, raising the CY 66 totals another notch. Other portions of the requirement were also destined to climb.

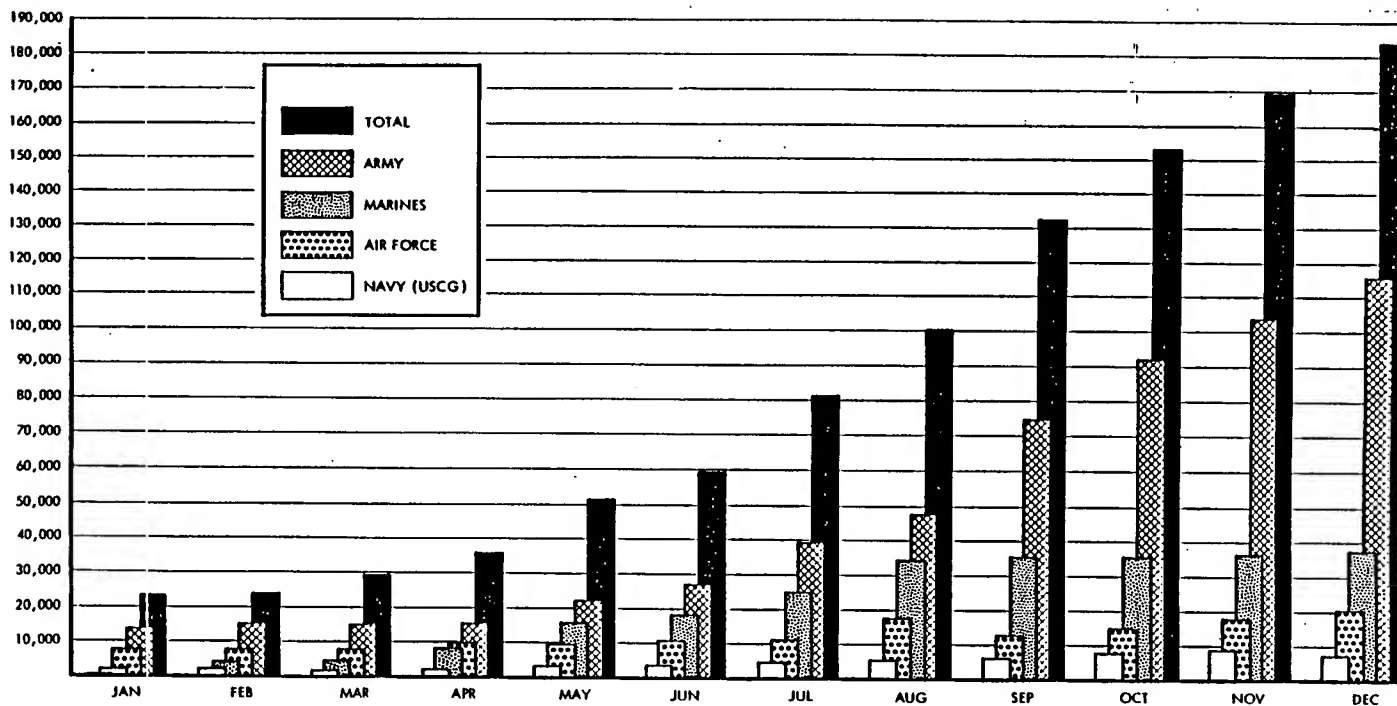
(9) By now, as the early months of 1966 would painfully demonstrate, the question of how many forces were required for the Vietnam war was rapidly giving way to the more fundamental question of how much was the U.S. capable of providing. Another Honolulu Conference in January, followed by another SecDef visit to CINCPAC Headquarters in February, would bring to a head not only the issue of what, in the face of limited resources, was feasible, but equally important, what optimum trade-off of advantages for Vietnam purposes against sacrifices elsewhere was acceptable.

(10) Impressive as the proportions of future deployments promised to be, the respectable dimensions of present achievements already realized, largely during the latter half of 1965, represented no mean feat in their own right. The end of December in-country strength figures for deployed U.S. forces that had actually closed in South Vietnam reached 184,314, of which 116,755 were U.S. Army, 8,749 Navy, 38,190 Marines, and 20,620 Air Force. With the more than 21,000 ROK/ANZAC troops, the U.S./Allied in-country total was now well over 205,400 - almost all that had been scheduled to arrive under the Phase I concept within the 1965 time frame. Moreover, in Thailand, related deployments had brought the U.S. in-country strength figure there to approximately 14,100 by year's end.

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FIGURE 1 (C). Month-End Strengths - U.S. Forces Deployed in Vietnam - 1965 (U)

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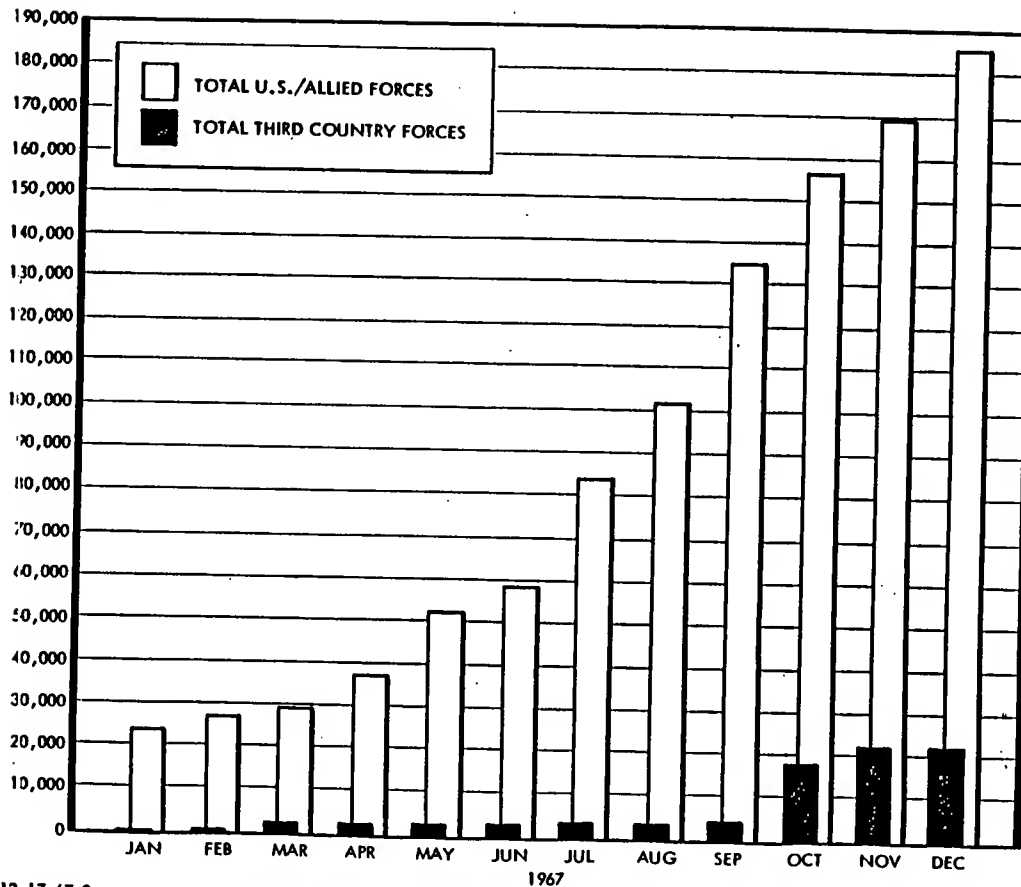
MONTH	ROK	AUST	NZ	COMBINED PHIL ROC THAI	TOTAL
JAN	140	162	24	62	388
FEB	609	162	25	58	854
MAR	2,127	160	25	69	2,381
APR	2,126	164	20	97	2,407
MAY	2,130	192	23	97	2,442
JUN	2,398	1,177	24	97	3,696
JUL	2,557	1,185	125	107	3,974
AUG	2,550	1,185	125	113	3,973
SEP	2,598	1,511	119	113	4,341
OCT	16,671	1,534	125	108	18,438
NOV	20,990	1,534	123	108	22,755
DEC	20,620	1,557	119	108	22,404

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FIGURE 2 (C). Third Country Forces Deployed in Vietnam - 1965 (U)

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FIGURE 3 (g). U.S./Allied Deployments Buildup - 1965 (U)

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INVENTORY OCT 15 1968

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